

Subject: Formal Feedback regarding Council Item E.5 "Safe Streets Bylaw and Parks and Open Space Bylaw Amendment"

From: Julian Legere Redacted
Sent: Monday, June 14, 2021 9:25 AM
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Subject: Formal Feedback regarding Council Item E.5 "Safe Streets Bylaw and Parks and Open Space Bylaw Amendment"

Dear Mayor and Council,

By way of this email TOGETHER WE STAND, a citizens group with 986 members is sending official formal feedback on Item E.5 "Safe Streets Bylaw and Parks and Open Space Bylaw Amendment" to be discussed this evening, June 14, 2021 during the scheduled "Open Council" meeting. We are deeply concerned with the recommended bylaw amendments and call for immediate ACTION at municipal, provincial and federal levels to escalate support for homeless and precariously housed community members in Prince George. We have 5 concerns:

1. Proposed amendments to bylaws No. 7370, 2002 and No. 9211, 2021 **increase chaos to homeless and precariously housed persons and the social service agencies who support them.** These amendments are harmful to people, unhelpful for Indigenous organizations, non-profits and social service agencies, damaging to businesses and expensive. We recommend that mayor and council immediately reject these bylaw amendments as they will further escalate chaos in our city.
2. The proposed amendments do not respond to people's real realities. Instead, we call mayor and council to **implement an emergency shelter plan that responds to people's realities, is based on respect, human dignity and reflects the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.** Homeless individuals are exhausted from being misplaced on a daily basis and inappropriate shelter puts people at higher risk of overdose death. Prince George does not have an adequate supply of appropriate shelter which considers the unique needs of individuals, including the need for longer-term stay including day times use, the need to store belongings, and the need to be accommodated with partners or pets. Appropriate shelter also recognizes that sobriety should not be a condition for shelter. We demand that the City and Province expedite low-barrier shelter options and in the meantime, provide a secure designated space for people to sleep outdoors, store their belongings, defecate, urinate and wash.
3. Our city needs a **reasonable long-term housing-first plan that ensures all homeless people have appropriate housing.** This is the most fiscally responsible way forward. The costs for institutional services (police, bylaw, ambulance, health, mental health) far out way housing. A long-term low-

barrier housing plan should be available **before January 2, 2022 when the L'heidli Tenneh flag is raised again.**

4. As a result of COVID-19, 75% of non-profit organizations in the Fraser Fort George reduced, canceled or changed in-person program. The evidence and analysis used to demonstrate the need for bylaw amendments are fundamentally flawed and do not recognize the devastating impact of COVID-19 in our community. Instead of punitive measures, we demand an **increase in resources (financial, staffing, political commitment, etc.) to social services and programs**, especially Indigenous agencies that support homeless and precariously housed community members.
5. The current "Open Council" processes exclude members of our community, especially those who lack technology and internet. We are denied the opportunity to engage "real-time" on matters which affect our lives. We demand that Mayor and Council **ensure homeless and precariously housed community members are engaged in democratic processes, and are part of creating reasonable emergency and long-term housing solutions.**

TOGETHER WE STAND formally requests a hearing to mayor and council at the next Council Meeting, scheduled for June 22. A fact sheet to further explain our concerns with the proposed bylaw is below.

Respectfully,
TOGETHER WE STAND

FACT SHEET: #STOP THE CHAOS

1. **The proposed bylaw amendments are unconstitutional and contravene international human rights laws.** In the 2015 BC Supreme Court case *BC/Yukon Association of Drug War Survivors (DWS) v City of Abbotsford* the B.C. Supreme Court ruled against municipal bylaws that displaced homeless people from public spaces. Section 7 of the Canadian Charter protects individual safety and security. Furthermore the "international human rights law does not permit governments to destroy peoples' homes, even if those homes are made of improvised materials and established without legal authority. Governments may not remove residents from encampments without meaningfully engaging with them and identifying alternative places to live that are acceptable to them" (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Housing, 2020)
2. **Forcing people into inappropriate shelters increases the risk of overdose.** Though Northern Health has the highest overdose death rate in the province, there are no shelters appropriate for unhoused people with substance use disorder. When drug users are forced or coerced into shelters without overdose prevention services they may hide drug use or go into withdrawal, increasing overdose death risk. As well, shelters make guests dispose of BC CDC-provided harm reduction supplies, increasing risk of infection. Shelters with overdose prevention services are needed.
3. **Evicting homeless people in Prince George re-enacts colonial practices.** There are clear connections between residential schools and homelessness: 1) Shelter systems are reminiscent of Residential School (beds lined in a row, strict rules); 2) Residential schools destroyed family systems, eroded life skills capabilities and created intergenerational trauma. This prevents many people from securing stable housing; 3) There is a strong connection between the children of residential schools and substance dependency and there is a strong connection between substance dependency and homelessness; 4) There is a strong connection between foster care and homelessness: 40% of youth experiencing homelessness have been involved with children welfare services, 52% of children in foster care are Indigenous – many of whom are children or grandchildren of Residential School Survivors; 5) The Residential School system was

an inadequate education which prevented graduates from competing in the labour market. Labour market exclusion contributes to poverty which is a top contributor to homelessness.

4. **The data being used to support the proposed amendments overlooks the devastating impact of COVID-19 on non-profits, social services and marginalized community members.** PG Bylaw reported double the number of “Calls for Services” (CFS) in 2020 but they fail to analyze the impact of COVID-19 on social services in PG. 75% of non-profits in the Fraser Fort George canceled, reduced or changed in-person programming. Furthermore, housing and food costs are on the rise. It should come as no surprise that we are seeing an increase in loitering, open drug use, tenting and increased CFS. There is literally no affordable indoor space for people to go.

“Because of COVID, we can only allow 18 people to come to our AA and Narcotics Anonymous meetings. I can facilitate up to 50 people but because of COVID rules, we can’t. We have zoom set up but there are a lot of people that are not comfortable with zoom. There are a lot of people that have dropped out of the programming because they can’t do in-person meetings.” Al Spencer, Alano Society