
Subject: Safe Streets Bylaw Final Reading

From: Richard Parks Redacted
Sent: Saturday, June 26, 2021 11:26 PM
To: cityclerk <cityclerk@princegeorge.ca>
Cc: mayorandcouncil <mayorandcouncil@princegeorge.ca>
Subject: Safe Streets Bylaw Final Reading
To the City Clerk:

I would like to convey my opposition to the "Safe Streets Bylaw" amendments that will likely be receiving final reading on June 28, 2021.

I oppose these amendments because the amendments only serve to stigmatize and discriminate Prince George citizens who are struggling with addictions or are having to deal with mental health issues on their own due to the lack of facilities and support workers in our community. City council recently received the final report on poverty reduction which indicated reducing stigmatization and discrimination is one of the top priorities to address poverty yet the majority of council thus far has chosen a path that only increases stigmatization and discrimination with their support of the "Safe Streets Bylaw" amendment.

In cities across Canada it has been shown that Indigenous people make up a disproportionate amount of people living on the street, jails and foster care systems. I ask council to consider what role our current and past laws have played in creating such a disparity. Addiction does not discriminate against race yet it is often perpetuated by the need to suppress trauma. We have Indigenous people living on the streets of Prince George and elsewhere that attended residential schools or have relatives that were forced to attend. The recent discovery of mass unmarked graves of indigenous children give further proof of the destructive legacy government mandated residential schools left on Indigenous people across this country. Is it any wonder why some Indigenous people have fallen victim to addiction in order to deal with that kind of generational trauma they have been put through. If council is truly committed to reconciliation let us not proceed with failed laws and willful ignorance that have only worked to continue to oppress people suffering from trauma and mental health issues on our streets. Our actions in the past and the present have consequences and we need to recognize this.

I think it is important for the council to recognize three specific and concerning consequences that may result from the "Safe Streets Bylaw" amendment:

1. People living in isolation are significantly more at risk of dying of an overdose
2. There is safety in numbers for women living on the street. Isolation will increase the chance of women becoming a victim of predation.
3. Giving people tickets with the expectation they won't pay harms their credit score which makes future opportunities to secure housing on their own much more difficult.

I sincerely urge council to consider the life and death impact their decision to support the "Safe Streets Bylaw" could have. The very name given to this bylaw is inherently disingenuous considering it won't make people living on the streets safer. We have an opportunity to not repeat past mistakes but it starts with council making the right decisions now.

Until low barrier housing is built for people living on the streets we should have dedicated areas for people to live with access to washrooms and clean drinking water. These are basic human needs that we can achieve if we don't allow ourselves to fall victim to the stigmatization associated with the news reporting of un-sanctioned tent communities in other cities. The overwhelming majority of tent communities that have been the subject of complaints have typically been put up over night with no oversight. I strongly believe that with the investment

that council has already made in increasing RCMP officers downtown council can ensure tent communities in designated areas remain safe in part by using those police officers involved with the Car60 program.

I know part of the reason why the council is acting on these amendments is due to complaints from business owners. Yet why hasn't the council been listening to the people living on the streets who have said that they wouldn't be sleeping in the doorway of a business if they could sleep in a tent on a vacant lot. They wouldn't have to use the washroom outside if they actually had an accessible washroom which is becoming more restrictive as more businesses are allowed by the city to close washrooms to the public.

To continually wag the finger at people living on the streets for the amount of crime in our city is also short sighted. I shake my head every time the Prince George Citizen writes an article about the latest drug bust as I know full well this won't be the last. These busts only serve to destabilize drug supply causing contaminated supplies from desperate new dealers wanting to fill the void left by these busts which also perpetuates bloody turf wars that have caused deaths all across this city and this province. Prohibition of alcohol didn't stop people from drinking and neither will laws meant to crack down on drug use. It is a personal choice that can only be addressed through education, compassion and medical treatment.

Mayors from across B.C. along with provincial governments, health professionals and even the RCMP have called on the Federal Government to decriminalize drugs so people can have access to a safe supply and come out of the shadows to get help with their addictions. The "Safe Streets" bylaw attempts to force people back in the shadows through an extra layer of criminality by ticketing people for drug use. This is a failed strategy that has been abandoned by most cities in Canada! If you want to win the war on drugs, take the money out of the hands of the gang bangers dealing the drugs. Government needs to take over the distribution of all drugs and use the profits to open up more addiction treatment centres and affordable housing. Mental health workers and social workers should be addressing the problems across this city rather than RCMP and bylaw officers.

If you want to reduce thefts in the city, recognize the obvious: a lot of theft is the result of people trying to feed their \$100,000 a year addiction. If we are going to fix this we need council to join municipal governments from across Canada who are publicly lobbying the federal government to decriminalize drugs so that the drug supply can be safe and affordable. If doctors could prescribe hard drugs to people on the streets struggling with addiction maybe they wouldn't have to spend their rent and food money on drugs.

The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting the same result. In a recent Prince George citizen article entitled "Council supports Safe Streets Bylaw" a city staff member is quoted as saying the following: " Adam Davey, the city's director of community services and public safety, said he doesn't expect many of the fines will be paid. But the purpose is to build a documented history of offences which can be used to build a court case against chronic offenders." Why would you need an amended bylaw to collect money if all you want is data to determine who are the chronic offenders? Isn't that information already collected by the local RCMP detachment that council paid extra money too not that long ago to enforce existing laws that already cover all the amendments to the "Safe Streets Bylaw" that council is considering? Shouldn't council be asking the RCMP for the data? And to what purpose does knowing who the chronic offenders are if the only solution council has to dealing with chronic offenders is to build a case to incarcerate. Did council ever stop to think how much it costs taxpayers to incarcerate an individual? Did council ever consider the impacts of a criminal record on securing a job? Or how about the effects of unpaid fines on a persons ability to independently secure housing on their own? All that work for probably a weekend in jail instead of directing resources that will actually rehabilitate individuals for life.

Council, you have a chance to save a life. You have the ability to revitalize the downtown from the inside out! You have a chance to cast aside populist politics and change the conversation from one that is stigmatizing to one that is compassionate. We have lives to save and past wrongs to atone for which can only happen if council is willing to treat all its citizens with human dignity. To recognize that the laws we pass now and in the future can continue on the cycle of oppression if we are not careful. Please, change your mind and vote no to the "Safe Streets Bylaw" amendment!

Sincerely,

Richard Parks
Prince George Resident

CC Mayor and Council