

***Together We Stand*** for a Safe, Clean,  
and Inclusive Prince George

**FOR ALL!**

PRESENTATION TO PG MAYOR AND COUNCIL  
AUGUST 30, 2021

We are concerned about Bylaw  
9209, 2021, and Bylaw 9210, 2021....

But, this presentation is about more  
than that!

# Prince George is experiencing growing pains



Are we going to grow into being a “Hub of the North” or are we going to stay stuck?

# Who are we?



Group by Gerry Healy

**TOGETHER WE STAND!!**

🔒 Private group · 1.2K members

→ Citizen-led Facebook group mobilized to create a Prince George that fosters compassion & understanding towards our unhoused community members

→ 1,000 voting-aged PG'ers  
◆ (2% of voters)

People are watching Prince George! We have group members from 49 other communities across BC, 8 in Alberta, and 11 countries. These may be students or people considering a Move Up to Prince George.



# We agree!

We agree with Mayor and Council, Downtown Prince George, Millar Addition Community Watch, PG Chamber of Commerce, the Gateway BIA, and homeless community members...

**PG HAS A REAL PROBLEM!**



PRINCE GEORGE PUBLIC LIBRARY



PRINCEGEORGE.CITIZEN.COM

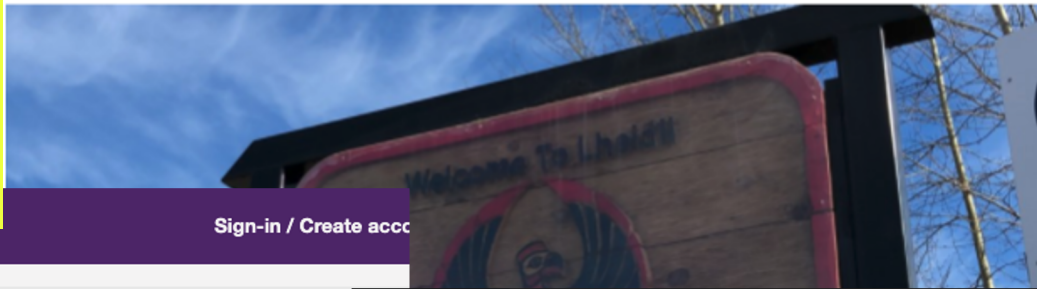
Prince George Public Library announces its locking washrooms for staff safety

75% of nonprofits cut, changed, or reduced their programs because of COVID and many have not yet resumed

# Lheidli T'enneh flag to be lowered for 215 days in honour of residential school victims

The flag-lowering will take place June 1 at noon

May 31, 2021 11:31 AM By: [Hanna Petersen](#)



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# Opioid crimes up as COVID-fuelled overdose crisis continues

Cannabis crime rate continues drop since 2018 legalization

Jul 27, 2021 12:52 PM By: [Jeremy Hainsworth](#)



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Male walking towards fort George Park. Indigenous male wearing long black sleeve shirt jeans black hair looking in yards. RCMP have been notified

3 14 Comments Seen by 139

Like Comment

All Comments

Good thing he is ingenious

Like Reply · 18h

I also thought it was an odd spot to add that compliment.

Like Reply · 17h

# We have a COMPLEX SOCIAL CRISIS!

Systematic racism and discrimination

Entrenched poverty

Limited stock of affordable housing

Increase in toxic drug supply and overdoses

Severe shortages of social services

*A complex social crisis requires sophisticated solutions.*

# We understand that the Safe Streets Bylaws are intended to create compliance for:

Aggressive panhandling

Loitering

Littering

Laying on or obstructing sidewalks

Graffiti

Overt drug use

Disposal of needles and drug paraphernalia

Creation of structures and temporary shelters

Open burning

*Making our city feel cleaner, safer, and more inclusive. BUT...*

# We disagree...

The Safe Street Bylaws (9209, 2021 and 9210, 2021) are an overly **SIMPLISTIC** approach to a **COMPLEX** problem. We do not believe the Safe Street Bylaws will be:

EFFECTIVE

EFFICIENT

HUMANE

*Let us tell you why...*

# Our process

- Weekly “open dialogues” via Zoom
- Open online discussions
- Exploratory consultation with people who will be the target of bylaws
- Secondary research
  - ◆ Past legal precedent, other cities and their approaches, punitive vs. non-punitive measures, determinants of health including mental health, trauma, and compliance
- Closed discussion group



# Are the Safe Streets Bylaws

EFFECTIVE

?



No. You wouldn't fight a forest fire with a water gun, would you?



“With this bylaw they are just going to keep handing out paperwork. **People wouldn’t be sitting here if they had the community services that were taken away from the public.** Like the Christian Life Centre, St. Vinny’s , Sheppard’s Corner, Fire Pit.” —Barb

“I can’t afford housing. All the low-cost housing is gone or it’s so terrible no one wants to live in it. **We have nowhere else to go...** no wind breaks except in the store fronts and of course one in ten people is always a “\*&@#!” and ruins it for all of us. We aren’t allowed to sit anywhere.” —Ron

“I understand both sides. I can see it because I was a business owner. But I don’t agree with this. They will charge these people and from here **they will go to other parts of the city.** The only way to address this is to move these services away from 3<sup>rd</sup> avenue.” —Curtis

“It will keep happening.” —Charles



“It will not be effective. There are not enough safe injections sites. It doesn’t matter how much bylaw you put through, we have just one room for safe injection. **It’s not for being ignorant [that we do drugs here] it’s because there are not enough 24-hour injections sites.** Especially places to smoke. Will they pay for the funerals of the people who will die in alleys?” —Cici

“I panhandle for my income. Am I aggressive? They kick me off of McDonald’s property for asking for spare change. I need money for drugs. I have a pension but I panhandle because it’s hard to wait for that long before my pension comes. I used to steal. They don’t understand what we went through. They should follow me for a day. How do you expect us to pay [bylaw fines]? **We will pay with our flesh.**” —Barb

“Mental health, housing, and medical support are all provincial responsibilities yet here in downtown Prince George we are left to repair and rebuild well-being. **I applaud the city for intending to push for more mental health, housing, and medical supports** for all those who need these services. I respect their efforts. All three levels of government have a role to play here. As do charities and kind neighbors. The federal government should also be doing everything that has been promised regarding land settlements, respect, reconciliation with Indigenous communities (and this would be likely to decrease the numbers of folks in pain and struggling).

In this desperate interval, maybe having a tent village in a safe and reasonable place with supports is a pragmatic step — while also doing everything else necessary (advocating for housing, safe injection sites, compassionate care, etc.). **Fines are silly.** Unless they are being intended as a last resort and as a way into other short term feeble solutions.”

**Si Transken, PhD, RSW, DVATI Associate Professor**

School of Social Work, University of Northern British Columbia

she/her

# Are the Safe Streets Bylaws **EFFICIENT** ?



1. What is the cost to **manage the bylaw**? (Communication, Bylaw officers, processing expenses, etc. And who will benefit?)
2. What is the cost to pay for the **legal disputes** when the City is found in contravention to the Supreme Court? (*Abbotsford v. Shantz*)
3. What are the **unintended costs**? (“Are they going to pay for funerals?” “Bylaw officers are just doing their job. They have to do the policy work. They have never been ignorant to me but now they have to do a "crappy" job and they might get hurt.”)
4. Are there **more effective ways to spend** the money allocated to implement and manage the Safe Street Bylaws? What else has been explored?

*If this information is not available, then we are ill-prepared to make an informed decision.*

**We are tired of our taxpayer dollars being wasted** on solutions that are not an improvement! We need a mayor and counsellors who will support initiatives that produce a net gain to any situation. Fining poor people is not going to improve the lives of the downtown business owners! It is not a net improvement.” —April

“Basic human dignity is what is going to go the furthest for the betterment of our city overall. **Access to toilets, water, food and shelter** that allows for people to stay together (couples, friends)... Past trauma means people are afraid to be alone; they need companionship, whether it is a dog or a spouse. Addictions must be attended to.” —Brenda

“My finances are not great so slapping a fine on that won’t help. **It’s like trying to squeeze water from a brick.**” —Curtis

“They are upper class people and they are preying on less fortunate people. Having a place for people to go is better than **having people all over the place.**” —Young Dude 2

“Our social problems will become more invisible, this will contribute to overdose death, it will be **harder for social agencies to focus services** and more difficult to deliver safety and prevention efforts. Not to mention, men in uniform will benefit disproportionately.” —Amelia



# Are the Safe Streets Bylaws

HUMANE

?



No. (Press PLAY and Maybelline will tell you why.)

There will be an **increase in overdose deaths** as drugs are moved ‘out of sight’ to alleyways.

56% of the people we spoke to were DIRECTLY impacted by Canada’s Residential “Schools.” This bylaw approach perpetuates **colonial violence**.

“**Fines hold you back from having a better life.** Like going for your driver's license. I lived in poverty so long. I couldn't pay those. I started getting fines when I wasn't even 19 yet. And finally paid them last year. Violation fines have to be paid in full if I want to go for my L. My life would have been better if I had a license and a vehicle. I'd be out living my way of life in my traditional lands.” — MayDay

*Just yesterday I was sitting in my basement...*





These bylaws give power to stigma.

They criminalize poverty and homelessness.

They create a documentation history that will lead to people being incarcerated.

Those people will disproportionately be Indigneous.

In an era of reconciliation, **this is inexcusable.**

# In summary, the Safe Streets Bylaws are...

~~EFFECTIVE~~

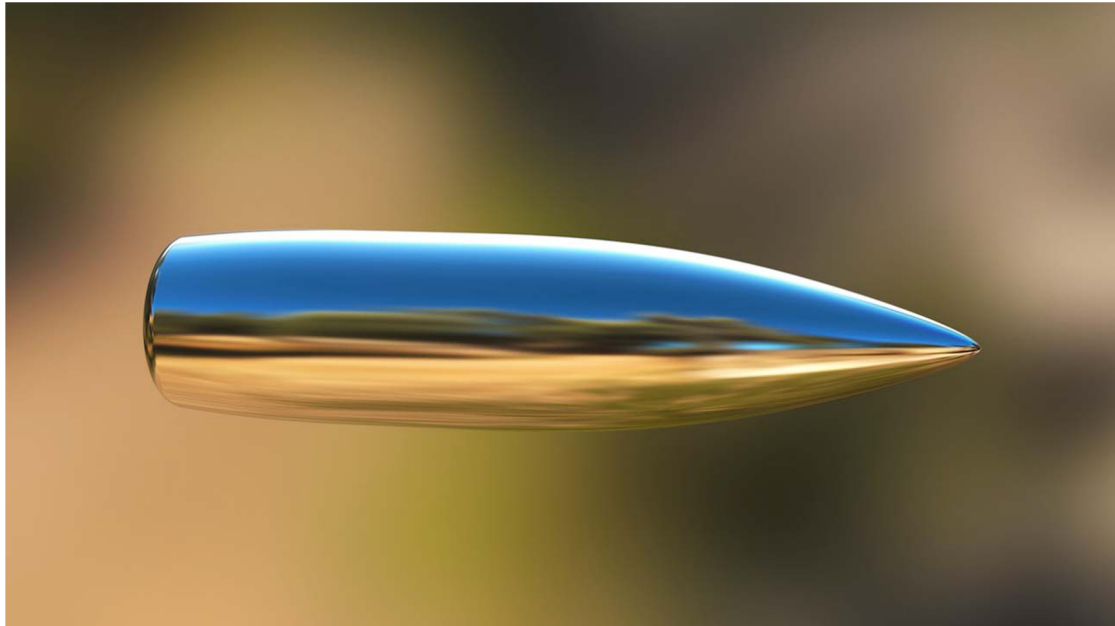
~~EFFICIENT~~

~~HUMANE~~

*But we have some ideas to share...*



# We know there is no Silver Bullet



The City has limited power and resources. We can't wait until 1<sup>st</sup> Ave is built. But we CAN take action!

# We need to be realistic!

We will **NEVER** find a perfect solution! Instead, we need to create confidence in *the process of deliberation*, in *the duty bearers*, and in *each other* so that we can change perspectives and when things go awry we can speak up, even across difference.

(Bonvin et al., 2018)

“There needs to be adequate input from the various parties to the discussion. Personally, were I Mayor I would spend some time talking with and listening to the various participants in the situation. The homeless, the business people, the government, and healthcare and housing service providers. Hopefully I would gain a fuller, broader understanding and possibly some insights into common ground solutions. At a minimum, I expect to find a starting point towards a solution. **There are never simple, quick solutions to complex problems.** Talking and listening is a start. The other first step is to find out what other communities with similar situations are doing and what results they are achieving. All of this requires transparency, communication, and patience. It requires compassion equal to firmness. None of this will be easy and despite the urgency, quick solutions are likely to be flawed. Seeking civil, effective, common ground is the aspiration.”

Roy Spooner

# Confidence in the Consultation Process

- **Who was consulted?** If it did not include homeless women and youth, First Nations agencies, CNC and UNBC, and social work and health experts, *then it was insufficient*.
- **What was asked?** If the scope of consultation did not reflect the complex social factors contributing to the increase in CFS, *then it was insufficient*.
- **Who was asking questions?** If the team conducting consultation did not create adequate space for people who are typically excluded from democratic power, *then it was insufficient*.
- **How was it analyzed and recorded?** If the data and analysis are not publicly available, *then it is insufficient*.

*Have we done adequate consultation?*

# We want a Safe, Clean, and Inclusive PG

We want to feel inspired in our city and enjoy being in public together. We want our children to walk down the street paying attention to the drips of their delicious Frozen Paddle ice cream. We want to leave the farmers market on Saturday, enjoying the smell of fresh bread and not to be preoccupied with worries about the devastating inequities and racism that our community faces.

We acknowledge where we've come from — in 2011, we were “Canada's most dangerous city” and now we're 14<sup>th</sup> — AND we can still do better!



# Focus the Bylaws on LITTER

“Just because they have no place to go doesn’t mean that it is OK to throw their garbage on the ground. There are garbage cans everywhere!” —Barb

“A bylaw about garbage and pile-ups, that’s OK. That’s for construction sites, homes, driveways, anywhere. Anything can burn. We need to move the hazards. It’s not the fire itself that is the problem.” —Young Dude 1

“The focus of concern should be the garbage pile in driveways. Every tent is cleaner than some of the driveways I’ve seen. That’s the stuff that provides fuel for fire. That’s the problem.” —Young Dude 2

“It’s stupid. We have nowhere else to go. Some of you don’t even know what we’ve been through. We have no job. The garbage part I understand that, but the rest won’t help.” —18 year old girl

# Hold off on the other aspects of the Bylaws until...

1. The City has conducted *adequate* consultation
2. The City has exhausted Provincial and Federal authorities' efforts
3. Mayor and Council have committed to a trauma-informed approach (start by watching "[The Wisdom of Trauma](#)")
4. Wrap-around programs that address psycho-social well-being have been made widely available and social services resume to pre-COVID levels
5. Long-term housing that addresses systemic discrimination is available
6. There is no waitlist for detox, there are more safe injection sites accessible 24/7, and there is transportation to and from safe injection sites

7. There are more designated public places for people to rest, socialize, and provide power and Wi-Fi
8. All bylaw officers have completed trauma training and cultural safety; and >50% of bylaw officers are women and Indigenous
9. Coordination across the shelter system is strengthened, and there is a harmonization of policies (i.e. to deal with restricted individuals)
10. Shelter and outreach workers have increased training, pay, and benefits, commensurate at least to the City's bylaw services
11. More food banks are accessible and there's a way to make a couple of bucks
12. Public education about homelessness, drug use and what you CAN do and WHERE you can do it (drugs, loitering, panhandling, etc.)
13. Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples and Nations is taken seriously

# This is HARD work and it will take all of us!

We know PG Mayor and Council have limited power and jurisdiction... But, we CAN do something. Medicine Hat has ENDED homelessness. Lethbridge & Victoria are doing something cool.

We have great organizations that are already working hard, but the public needs to be galvanized and brought together for radical change.

## **Finland ended homelessness**

“It was clear to everyone that the old system wasn’t working: we needed radical change,” explained Juha Kaakinen, director of the Y-Foundation, an NGO which provides homes for the homeless.”

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/02/how-finland-solved-homelessness>

“Through perseverance, progressive change, the development and a reconsideration of beliefs, Medicine Hat has become a community willing to take on the systems, engage in the difficult conversations and move towards finding a successful outcome for those within the vulnerable population,” says **Jaime Rogers, Manager of Homeless & Housing Development for Medicine Hat Community Housing Society.**

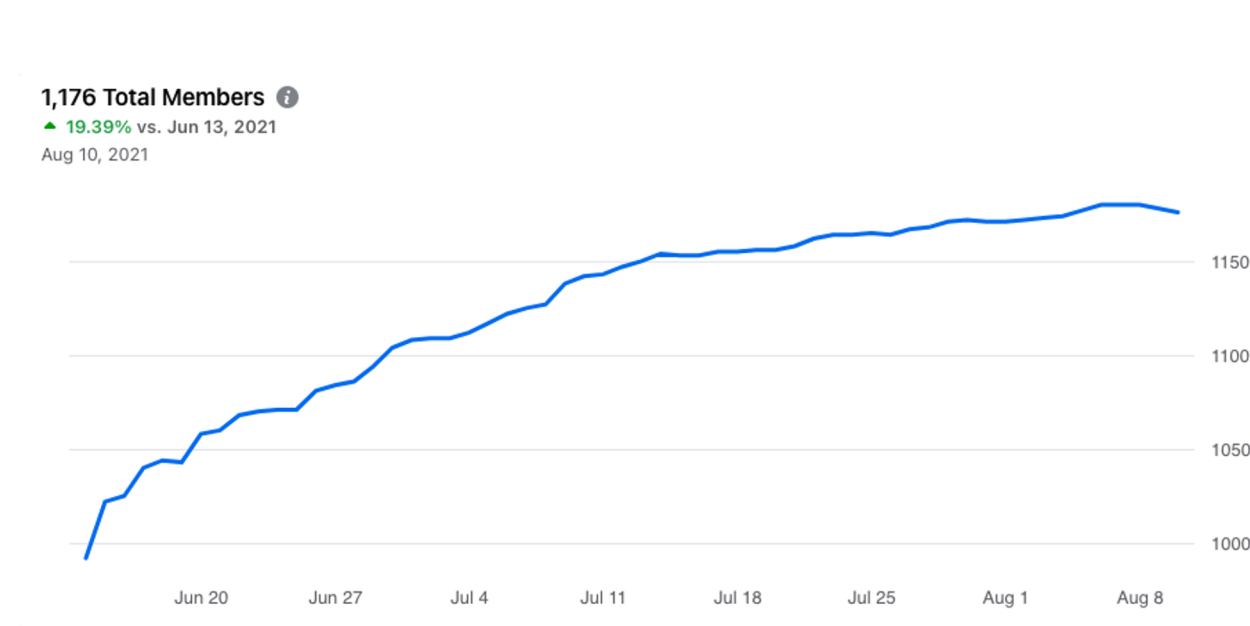


*Together We Stand* is ready to be part of radical change.

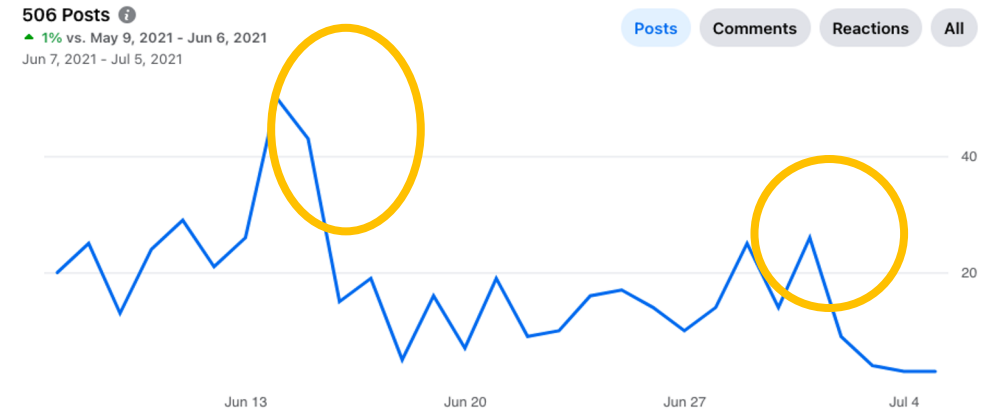
Let's grow into our important role as the **Hub of the North** with courage, compassion, and UNITY.

# APPENDIX

# PG cares deeply and is engaged...



*Together We Stand* has seen a 20% **increase** in membership since the June 14th council meeting



A lot of people engaged regarding the Safe Streets Bylaws & Amendment

Some posts have reached 798 people and had 284 points of engagement!



# We offer time and resources to make PG better

- We've given food & water
- We've contributed to health drives
- We've organized accessible yoga, free meals, and events
- We've donated tents, tarps, mattresses, bikes, clothes, etc.
- We've written articles & submitted proposals
- We've worked hard to educate our neighbors & friends about the complexity of this social crisis

# Want to learn more?

- <https://www.homelesshub.ca/>
- <https://thewisdomoftrauma.com/>
- <https://www.sanyas.ca/training>
- Homelessness: How to End the National Crisis, Jack Layton, 2008

Literature review of punitive and non-punitive measures are available.

For more information, please contact [amelia.merrick@utoronto.ca](mailto:amelia.merrick@utoronto.ca)