



October 6, 2023

**Mayor & Council, City of Campbell River**

Via Email

Dear Campbell River City Council,

I write this letter concerned with the dialogue and process that occurred at the Council meeting on September 28th, 2023 regarding the permissive tax exemptions for the Campbell River Art Gallery (“the CRAG”) and the Overdose Prevention Site/Sobering Assessment Centre (“the OPS”) and ask that you reverse your decision. Non-profit funding structures leave little room for unexpected expenses and this decision seems unpredictable indeed.

Downtown cultural activities are an important part of creating a vibrant downtown and the CRAG is an important community partner; even working with the City of Campbell River for Live Streets events. They provide drop-in art and social connection opportunities for people experiencing homelessness via their Art Hive program; and we know that creating a sense of purpose, community, and a creative outlet are all important factors as people work to come to a better place in their lives. While they have no mandate for enforcement, they do ask people using the property to tidy-up after themselves and to move along when they open in the mornings.

The OPS is providing an important, lifesaving, provincially-mandated service in the midst of a toxic drug crisis. At the Table of Partners meetings, VIMHS staff have explained the many ways in which they do their best to be a good neighbour under very challenging circumstances. They also actively and willingly participate in the downtown security program. In fact, when viewing OPS sites in other communities, it is apparent that VIMHS is doing an exceptional job and have gone to great extents to be considerate community partners.

Both organizations report concerning and aggressive behaviours on and around their property to the RCMP. Both of these organizations are important to people in our community.

The dialogue that was presented at the Council meeting was short on details, referring to the parties as “bad neighbours” but not drawing on examples to explain such. No opportunity was created for conversation between the parties and the City prior to this abrupt decision. At one point in the Council meeting, Ms. Brovold indicated that each of these organizations would have had no previous indication that they were not going to receive the exemption, thus giving them no opportunity to book a delegation to Council to discuss the concerns.

It seems as though there is a misunderstanding as to the nature and complexity of the concerns downtown. Our downtown unease is not unique to Campbell River. Homelessness, substance use, and mental health concerns are rising across the Province. This is systemic. This is not the work of any local agencies on the ground. Poor policy created this and only good policy will mend it. None of this policy was created by non-profit organizations.

I am left wondering what the City is hoping that each of these agencies will do differently. What are the requests that are on the table? What, specifically, is the City requesting these organizations do to avoid this sort of punitive action? Is the expectation that businesses and nonprofits undertake enforcement activities on their properties for which they do not have the resources and expertise?

The Coalition is supportive of respectful, evidence-informed dialogue. The lack of communication to these agencies and at the Council meeting does not suggest transparency, partnership, or solution-focussed values.

Sincerely,

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