



June 13, 2022

Mayor Adams and Council, City of Campbell River

Via: Email

The Campbell River and District Coalition to End Homelessness (CRDCEH) is writing to request a meeting between members of our Coordinating Circle and Mayor and Council. The CRDCEH Coordinating Circle is made up of representation from multiple sectors resulting in robust experience and knowledge.

The purpose of this meeting would be:

- To provide a fact-based update on the current state of homelessness and housing insecurity in Campbell River;
- To collaborate on solutions, recognizing the City of Campbell River as an integral partner to achieve our shared goal of ending homelessness and housing insecurity in the Strathcona region;
- To offer our collective expertise to City staff, committees, task forces, and Council to address current community concerns related to homelessness and housing insecurity in a professional, trauma-informed, and equity-focussed manner;
- To offer our services to support implementation of the following Downtown Safety Select Committee recommendations:
 - Recommendation #2 asks for more social service involvement in Nunns Creek Park clean-ups:
 - The CRDCEH has previously supported City staff in connecting with the appropriate outreach workers and setting up a system to inform them of clean-up days. While we are willing to continue having these discussions with social service agencies, it should be noted that the sector is struggling with capacity and not all agencies have the mandate to work in an outreach capacity.
 - The CRDCEH is well positioned to support the City in developing a strategy and action plan to facilitate the provision of additional social services in our community and to encourage development of a variety of affordable housing options.
 - Recommendation #4 asks that council assign a “champion” for lobbying for action on mental health facilities
 - The CRDCEH is currently involved in these types of efforts and would happily formalize this as a partnership with the City.
 - Recommendation #5 goes beyond downtown safety and into development
 - The CRDCEH would like to work with the City to present and promote a planned public event about affordable housing and the powers each level of government exercises in providing more and more diverse housing options.

Given the gravity of the topic, we propose that this meeting should take place over an entire morning or afternoon and that facilitation should be considered. For your reference, please see the background information attached as an appendix to this letter.

We look forward to your response and to working together more closely to address the challenge of homelessness in our community.

Sincerely,

Stefanie Hendrickson
Coordinator of the CRDCEH

On behalf of the current Coordinating Circle (see Appendix)

Appendix

Current Coordinating Circle Members

Michele Vanderwoude - **Assistant Program Manager for Campbell River, John Howard Society of the North Island**

Alison Liebel - **Community Engagement Manager, Habitat for Humanity Vancouver Island North**

Lisa McHaffie – **Community Member** - *Recently retired, formerly with Service Canada managing the federal Reaching Home program*

Taryn O’Flanagan – **Executive Director, Vancouver Island Mental Health Society**

Sue Moen – **Supportive Housing Services Manager, Salvation Army**

Madison Stewart – **Self-employed consultant**, *currently working for the Urban Indigenous Housing & Wellness Coalition and, separately, the Strathcona Community Food Hub*

Mary Ruth Snyder – **Executive Director, Campbell River & District Chamber of Commerce**

Sulyn Cedar – **Community Member, Quadra Island**

Meredith Starkey – **Manager of Parks & Planning, SRD** - *Representing the Strathcona Regional District until a Coordinator for the Strathcona Community Health Network can be hired*

Background Information

The CRDCEH is a coalition of a variety of contributors, with representation from the non-profit, social service, business, health, and government sectors. Our mission is “to end homelessness and housing insecurity in the Strathcona region by using the collective resources of our organizational partners and community members.” We adhere to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) which states that “*Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services*” and assert that people don’t choose to be homeless. We believe that effective solutions to homelessness must come from multi-sector cooperation. Interested and invested individuals and agencies who are able to help fulfill our mission are welcome to work alongside us and, as such, we can access significant knowledge.

It is unfortunate that, despite our broad range of expertise and experience, the Downtown Safety Select Committee did not contact the CRDCEH for information or guidance. The CRDCEH acknowledges that homelessness is a problem in our community. There are health risks present, criminal activity, and negative impacts on businesses and individuals, including those who are both housed and unhoused. This is not unique to our municipality or region. We encourage multi-sector community collaboration to find solutions that could make an impact without compounding trauma.

The Downtown Safety Select Committee Report and Recommendations (May 17, 2022), as well as the delegation to Council (May 30, 2022) contain some concerning examples of how a well-meaning but mis-informed committee can unintentionally cause harm and hinder efforts to alleviate homelessness. Specifically, this report relied on anecdotal and assumptive terms rather than data and included several words and phrases that are problematic when considering safety in our community. For example:

1. The term “dangerous ghetto” is not only inaccurate to the true meaning of ‘ghetto’ but also serves to dehumanize individuals living in traumatic circumstances. While we recognize the negative behaviour and negative impact on park use, we encourage using specific, accurate, and real descriptions of activities to identify and work towards solutions that are compassionate at their core.
2. The terms “proliferation of anarchy downtown” and “lawless environment” are inflammatory phrases that could be said to elicit an over-response and justify extreme measures that may not be based on best-practices.

We have noticed an increase in the use and acceptance of language that increases polarization, fear, and anger in the community. This can create emotional responses instead of well-reasoned, evidence-based, and trauma-informed responses. Furthermore, these emotions can discourage people from using the downtown and visiting downtown businesses. Given the choice of language in the document, it is disappointing that the content of the report was “approved in principle.”

Furthermore, in the delegation to Council, some concerning statements were made. To suggest that limiting the resources and social services available for people experiencing homelessness is a solution to homelessness not only over-simplifies a complex situation but suggests additional trauma for individuals and the removal of basic human rights. It is concerning that this statement went unchallenged at the Council meeting.

Overall, the type of language being used throughout the community is creating barriers to solutions and perpetuating the very concerns we all want to solve.