



City of Maple Ridge News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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For further information, contact:
Mayor Nicole Read at 604-463-5221
nread@mapleridge.ca

Maple Ridge Council Requests that Province Show Leadership in Housing Crisis

Maple Ridge, BC: On September 23, the City sent a letter to Premier Christy Clark urging the Province to clarify comments made by the Premier during an interview with local media. There were issues with her comments, published by the local newspaper 'The Maple Ridge News,' that were of concern.

The first was an assertion that the City had made the proposal to renovate the Quality Inn to address the imminent closure of the temporary shelter at the end of March. The actual proposal came from BC Housing and the Ministry of Housing and was withdrawn when the local MLAs did not support their government's solution. Council was very concerned that the Premier's comments reflect that she had been misinformed on actual details of the first proposal.

The second area of concern for Council was a comment from Premier Christy Clark stating that the final decision on the location of the proposed shelter and housing facility would depend on the support of local MLAs Dr. Doug Bing and Marc Dalton. To quote from her comments, "When Marc and Doug can support a proposal that's the one we're going to move on."

This comment suggests that the local MLAs are the defacto approval authorities for any permanent housing facility in the community. Timing is critical. As a result of the cancellation of the Quality Inn proposal in March the shelter has received two extensions and is now scheduled to close on March 31 of 2017

As of today, the City has received no response to the letter to the Premier.

On October 5, after learning that the Province may request yet another extension to the shelter, a letter was sent by Chief Administrative Officer, Ted Swabey, to Executive Director, BC Housing, Shayne Ramsay, expressing deep concern about the length of the shelter's operation and the deleterious effects of the temporary shelter on its residents, staff and the surrounding community. This letter explained that the shelter has reached a critical point and included a list of incidents that are of grave concern to Council and staff. Adding to this list of incidents, on October 10, a smoke bomb was dropped into the shelter area by as yet unknown assailants, resulting in a full evacuation of the shelter's vulnerable population.

Maple Ridge is calling on the Province to show decisiveness and urgency in addressing the ongoing needs of homeless persons in the community. These are individuals who have been assessed through BC Housing's Vulnerability Assessment Tool (VAT) as needing significant health supports alongside housing. It has been one year since the temporary shelter opened in a former mattress shop. The site was not designed for, nor intended to be, a long-term solution and its occupants were supposed to be housed within the first six-month operating period.

"Enough is enough. Our City is becoming further and further divided and our vulnerable citizens more and more at risk as we await a solution that is not fraught with misalignment within the provincial government," said Maple Ridge Mayor Nicole Read. "Staff and local service providers have demonstrated incredible capacity for success, yet we find ourselves unable to move forward because individuals within the same government cannot agree on the approach. The current approach is simply not good enough for homeless citizens whose lives hang in the balance or our public who already struggle to trust provincial outcomes in the areas of mental health and addiction."

She continued, "Maple Ridge has repeatedly demonstrated the value we place in our partnership with the provincial government through various successful initiatives. We have consistently met challenging province-wide issues like homelessness and youth mental health with courage and leadership. Citizens need to see the project plan that the Premier, Housing Minister, Local MLAs and BC Housing agree is the right solution to deal with this urgent situation."

The letters sent to Premier Christy Clark and BC Housing appear at the end of this release as part of the 'Background Information'. For more information please contact Mayor Nicole Read at nread@mapleridge.ca or by phone at 604-463-5221.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Letter sent to Premier Christy Clark asking for clarification of comments made in local media interview and revised decision-making process;

September 23, 2016

Honourable Christy Clark

Premier

P. O. Box 9041, Stn Prov Govt

Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Clark:

Our Council and staff recently became aware of an interview you were involved in respecting the low barrier shelter and supportive housing proposal for Maple Ridge. The interview resulted in both a written article and a video, published by our local paper. I note that MLA Marc Dalton was also present at that interview. I think it's important for our citizens to hear directly from our Premier, so I'd like to extend my appreciation for the time you took to sit down for the interview. I regret that the interview, while a positive attempt to clarify process, has created some confusion that our Council feels the need to address by way of this letter.

As a starting point, we want you to know that we are very appreciative for the \$15 million commitment made by the Province for the capital and operating costs toward a purpose-built facility to house our City's homeless population – a population that is young and extremely vulnerable. Our commitment to the partnership with the Province on this project was to purchase and appropriately rezone the land. As you are aware, we purchased a piece of property at 21375 Lougheed Highway after being directed by BC Housing that it met their specifications for the intended use. BC Housing subsequently recommended, in accordance with their needs assessment of our homeless population, that the facility be comprised of a low barrier shelter and supportive housing. BC Housing also asked for a second extension to the temporary shelter for a period of nine-months to allow time to transition temporary shelter residents to a temporary, modular site. Since that request, BC Housing has suggested it may be

possible to construct part of the purpose-built facility to accommodate those needing to leave the temporary shelter at the end of nine months.

It is important to us that we honor the commitment to close the temporary shelter at the end of the aforementioned nine-month extension period. The temporary shelter was never designed as a long-term solution. You will recall that the Province made a commitment to fund the temporary shelter as a means of clearing the Cliff Avenue homeless camp without an injunction. It was an emergency measure to provide a safe alternative to camping on the streets. From the temporary shelter, BC Housing was committed to moving all homeless citizens into housing. As we approached the end of the six month operating period, BC Housing communicated to Maple Ridge staff and Council that the needs of the temporary shelter population were so challenging and so acute that they could not be met within our existing supply of housing, market or otherwise. It was in light of this that BC Housing, with the support of Minister Coleman, brought forward the Quality Inn decampment proposal, asking Council to approve the first three-month temporary shelter extension to allow time to renovate the hotel in advance of rezoning, in order to move homeless citizens out of the temporary shelter.

You may have been misinformed and as such misspoke in the interview when you suggested that it was the City who initiated the Quality Inn proposal. It's important to us that information shared on this issue is accurate. I think it is fair to say that our team felt quite impacted by the process that unfolded around the Quality Inn. Your government created urgency around this solution because it was realized that shelter residents could not be housed in market rentals or existing supportive units as previously planned. Council adopted that urgency, and supported the proposal and the three-month temporary shelter extension, both contentious issues for our public, because we believed it was the right thing to do for the vulnerable population waiting in the temporary shelter for homes and health supports. It was clear to us during the process that the MLAs were not being kept updated by their own government and, in the face of public backlash, and, in spite of the proposal having the strong endorsement from the Deputy Premier as the solution, our MLAs opposed the project and it was quashed just days in advance of public engagement taking place. Most unfortunate of all was the impact that this decision-making had on the people in the temporary shelter who got their hopes up that homes were on the near horizon.

Our Council has thus experienced the impact of misalignment within the provincial government around the first proposed housing project. I hope you can appreciate our confusion in that first

round. Perceived housing experts from the provincial government, namely, Minister Rich Coleman and staff at BC Housing, emphasized the importance of delivering the Quality Inn as an urgent solution to meet the needs of our shelter population only to have their solution opposed by individuals within their own government.

In your interview, you indicated that “when Marc and Doug can support a proposal, that’s the one we’ll go with.” This has created confusion in round two. We were assured, before embarking down the path to the purpose-built facility, that your government would make sure there was alignment with the MLAs. You can imagine our surprise when, in a recent meeting, MLAs Bing and Dalton suggested to myself and staff that they had not been briefed on the low barrier shelter/supportive housing model suggested for the 21375 Lougheed Highway property. And now, it appears, they have been appointed the de-facto “approving authority” for the Province. We encourage this decision. It is the way it should always have been; however, it requires an adjustment in process.

Based on the above, Maple Ridge Council recommends that the MLAs, with the support of BC Housing and the provincial government, manage the public engagement process we have developed and fully inform themselves about the strategy behind the provincial government’s approach to Housing First and low barrier models, since these are the approaches suggested by BC Housing for our community. To better support this change in process the City will gift the Province the land identified for this project. Gifting the land allows the Province to take full accountability and control of the process which is in alignment with your stated objectives. This also allows the Province to proceed at a faster pace given that the lands would not require zoning under provincial ownership. Following the public engagement process, if it is determined by the Province not to be the suitable location for the facility, the Province can exchange it for an alternative parcel that MLA Bing and MLA Dalton find suitable. Our only expectation is that the community be fully engaged by the MLA’s and that the City also be included in this consultation. We would expect that any operational concerns agreed to as part of the consultation process would be secured through the gifting of the land. I’m sure you can imagine that, after what occurred with the Quality Inn decision, it would be very difficult for our staff and Council to manage the engagement process, address a large response from our public in person, by phone, by email and on social media, and go through the rezoning process, only to learn at the end of it all, that the MLAs are not supportive. That’s not fair to our community or to the homeless directly affected by a decision such as this. The reasonable approach is for MLA

Bing and MLA Dalton along with BC Housing to lead the public engagement process to arrive at a location that they can support.

Finally, I would like to address one last point about the interview. You emphasized the importance of listening to the citizens of Maple Ridge. We agree. We have been receiving and responding to feedback from our citizens throughout the Quality Inn proposal and since entering into this next phase toward the purpose-built facility. What stands out, above all else, is the public's opposition to the low-barrier model. This model has generated fear and confusion among our citizens.

In light of a proposal for a low barrier shelter and supportive housing facility in our City, we have been left on our own to advocate and, while staff and Council have learned a great deal over the last many months about addressing homelessness, we are not the experts. Clearer communication from the Province about why a low barrier model was proposed by the Province for our city and how that low barrier model is proven to work would assist in reducing speculation and a considerable amount of both intentional and unintentional stigmatization and discrimination of our vulnerable people. One thing I have learned on this journey is that community sentiment has a direct impact on a vulnerable person's success or failure. How could it not? When you already have so much pain in your life that you're turning to fentanyl, I cannot imagine the added pain and destruction of feeling hated by a large group of people in your community.

I regret that we have been unable, as of yet, to make each other's acquaintance in person. I look forward to a future meeting where we can sit down over coffee and discuss some key drivers of homelessness in our community. It's unfortunate that you and Minister Lake cannot attend a meeting with our Council during UBCM next week, but I appreciate that you are busy and we are thankful for the opportunity to meet a number of other important Ministers.

In closing, I would like to reiterate our deep commitment to connecting our homeless people to housing, health care and whatever other supports are needed to help them onto a new path. We know that housing is a positive first step because we've seen the outcomes produced by our local outreach team who have housed over 100 people since the start of the Cliff Avenue camp and today. I agree with Minister Coleman, Housing First works, and all of us at the City of Maple Ridge would like to see those remaining in the shelter, in need of more intensive support, offered the chance at success. This will only work if all of the Provincial representatives are in

agreement from the outset. We therefore look forward to hearing from you on how MLA Bing and MLA Dalton plan to lead the public engagement process alongside BC Housing, to arrive at a location that they can support.

Sincerely,

Nicole Read

Mayor

Letter sent by Maple Ridge CAO, Ted Swabey to BC Housing Executive Director Shayne Ramsay regarding the delay on moving forward and the impacts on the community;

Shayne:

As you are likely aware from recent correspondence sent from the City to the Province, we are extremely concerned with the outcomes associated with the current process for the Province's proposed Transitional Housing /Shelter Facility.

Public trust is waning significantly in the face of uncertainty about government accountability related to the delivery of housing and health care for the homeless. This is a health issue, not a social issue. Health care and housing the homeless is a Provincial responsibility, not local governments. The public is confused and is losing trust without the Provincial government taking direct accountability for this issue. The Premier has confirmed this through her statements that the local MLA's decide the location before a project can proceed in Maple Ridge. As you can understand we do not want to repeat the Quality Inn scenario and therefore it is paramount that the Province take the lead on this project.

We are extremely concerned with the well-being of those in the temporary shelter, and the untenable length of time they have been subjected to living in an inadequate facility with limited access to the health services they desperately require.

As you are aware the Province's Temporary Shelter opened October 1, 2015, and was intended to remain open for six months. After granting an extension, and with no clear end in sight, we are unable to provide any assurance or commitment to the community that the Province is committed to the project because of the uncertainty created by the Premier's comments and past unsupportive position respecting the Quality Inn and Provincial Low Barrier Program provided by the MLA's.

The Temporary Shelter was not intended, nor is it conducive, to providing long term housing and shelter for 40 individuals. However, the need for shelter continues to exist as the temporary shelter is full and there are a number of individuals being turned away each evening. RainCity staff estimate that they are turning away approximately 5 individuals per day. 191 individuals have been turned away since October 1, 2015.

The conditions under which these individuals exist in the temporary shelter is unacceptable and no doubt is the cause for growing conflict within the community towards the temporary shelter residents and its operators (i.e. RainCity).

This situation has reached a critical point of not only the impacts the shelter operation has on the community, but also on the well-being of those residing within the temporary shelter, those caring for the clients, and the general safety experienced in our downtown. The temporary shelter must come to an end and the homeless must be provided the housing and healthcare necessary to move forward on a path to stabilizing their lives.

Staff at the City, Rain City and the RCMP are reaching the breaking point emotionally in dealing with the constant near deaths associated with overdoses, responding to personal hate inflicted on them by the general public while on duty and while off duty, and the uncertainty the community has resulting from the Province pulling its original proposed use of the Quality Inn as a solution to the temporary shelter.

The current temporary shelter does not have adequate space for programming or for service providers to have a private session with a resident. Residents and service providers have adapted remarkably well but it is challenging. If there was adequate space to program and engage residents with appropriate supports and services the outcomes would likely be greater and more significant.

The ongoing impact of the highly visible temporary shelter on residents and staff is significant. RainCity has completed a number of renovations to increase safety for staff and residents. These renovations include:

- Locking the front entrance and having people ring the doorbell to gain access.*
- Installing an additional fence and gate at the front entrance to the Courtyard.*
- Installing a push bar at both exits to increase fire safety.*
- Covering the fence and barrier between KFC and the shelter with privacy slats.*

Almost half of the shelter residents are women and most of the staff are women. There is a higher rate of vulnerability for women in shelters and on the streets. This is of grave concern given the onset of winter and with the prospect of no permanent solution proceeding. The uncertainty of having a place to live has a direct impact on the health of those in the Temporary Shelter, which should not be tolerated. the potential extension of the shelter lease.

List of Incidences of Violence or Harassment of Shelter Residents and Staff:

The following provides a “snap shot” of the growing vitriolic harassment towards residents and Rain City employees since September, 2016. This does not include the online bullying and harassment that is also occurring and which Rain City has sought legal advice because of safety and reputation concerns. The number and severity of incidences of harassment and violence has increased in the last month.

- Sept 13, 2016*
 - o Staff member was verbally assaulted at her child’s football practice by the coach because she works with “those people” “you should be ashamed you kill people”*
- Sept 13, 2016*
 - o Resident assaulted by community member while bottling, RCMP called*
- Sept 11, 2016*
 - o Resident assaulted with pepper spray at nearby gas station, RCMP called*
- Sept 11, 2016*
 - o Resident assaulted with pepper spray through the back fence at shelter, RCMP called*
- Sept 10,2016*
 - o Community member looking through back gate and circling shelter filming, RCMP not called but was reported to Ash and Jenn*

- Sept 5, 2016
 - o Community member entered through back gate and filmed residents and staff, called staff member “addicted” and that’s why he was filming. He continued to film as he walked back to his truck, RCMP called
- July 18, 2016
 - o A resident asked staff to ask a man in van out front to leave. When staff approached he proceeded to circle the shelter a few times and utter threats. When he parked again he pulled out what looked to be a gun at staff and residents, RCMP were called
- June 25, 2016
 - o Community members were throwing full cans of pop at people who were perceived to be homeless
 - o A group of 5 middle aged men were standing out front of shelter at 6:50am and said to staff “what so (they) can come and hang around my storefront but I can’t stand outside of their home?”, RCMP not called
- June 24, 2016
 - o Two unknown males entered the shelter after breaking the front window, they then proceeded to attempt to fight one of the residents by pushing him once, staff told the two males that police were being called they left the shelter and took off with a third unknown male, RCMP called
- June 10, 2016
 - o A non-resident who was perceived to be homeless was being followed and intimidated by community members who were making kicking and punching gestures and yelling. The young woman was screaming for help and the residents who were outside ran over, RCMP were called
- April 30, 2016
 - o A large white cube van was circling the shelter after allegedly assaulting (hit with car) a resident of the shelter. One of the males came into the shelter and tried to coerce one of the women residents into his van. When staff walked outside the two men in the van were uttering threats to the group of residents and attempting to fight them. When the two men got back into the van they tried to run over a resident as sped off. While this was happening the bar traffic across the street yelled “get the junkies!!!”, RCMP were called
- April, 2016
 - o A community member jumped out of a vehicle in the Haney Public House parking lot and used a pipe to beat a resident of the shelter, RCMP was not called
- January 29, 2016
 - o Community members throwing rocks from the KFC drive through into the courtyard

- *January 1,2016*
 - o *A group of “biker” looking men came into shelter to retrieve a “stolen bike”. They said that next time they came in they would be “handing out beatings”, RCMP were called*
- *December,2015*
 - o *Resident came to staff member and shared that she had been attacked in the community. Resident was 8 months pregnant, RCMP not notified as per the residents request*
- *December 16,2015*
 - o *An older community member came into shelter and when staff asked him to leave he said that he “wants to see what’s going on here” and starting taking photos, RCMP were called*
- *November 15,2015*
 - o *A community member came inside shelter and started taking pictures*
- *October 31, 2015*
 - o *A community member entered courtyard, pushed through residents and staff, accused residents of stealing his belongings and stated “I have a right to be here I’m paying for this place”. He was asked to leave multiple times and became aggressive with staff, RCMP were called and as the community member left he kicked the large gate at the staff member and it hit her. He walked around the shelter and RCMP arrived and escorted him off property*
- *October 15, 2015*
 - o *A community member was taking photos in the courtyard*
- *October, 2015*
 - o *A community member took a selfie stick and put it through the men’s washroom window to take photos of the residents*

I cannot see Council supporting any further extensions to the temporary shelter. It must come to an end and result in proper housing and health services for these people. The confusion created by the Province's decision to pull the Quality Inn, and the latest comments from the Premier to empower the local MLA's as the “decision makers”, is why we have now offered to “gift” the land to the Province. This will allow the Province to proceed with its current proposed purpose built solution without rezoning the lands. This expedites the Province's ability to carry out the project in a time frame that does not require a temporary shelter extension. This is not unlike the original plan whereby the Province purchased the Quality Inn and proposed to proceed with renovating and operating the project in advance of the completion of any zoning from the City.

This is a crisis. There is no time for political finger pointing or extending the temporary shelter while we investigate other lands for a permanent solution. The Province has the power to proceed in absence of City Zoning. As mentioned previously, this is a mental health issue not a

social issue, and due to the current crisis we are experiencing the Province must take action to the fullest of its authority, especially in light of the declared fentanyl crisis.

We have provided the Province with the fastest and most accountable path to implement its program. It's time for the Province to act and move forward with consulting the public and constructing its proposed housing/shelter project. This crisis requires immediate leadership from the Province to provide the housing and health services required.

I trust this clarifies the current situation in Maple Ridge and our attempts to expedite the permanent solution offered by the Province. Please let me know if you require any further information.

Ted

Ted Swabey

Chief Administrative Officer