

Citizens Advisory Committee

Text of remarks from:

Christine Bickle, Chair

Rob Thiessen

Dr. Paul Beckett

Darin Froese

Good morning -

When we signed on as members of this committee, I don't think any of us pictured ourselves delivering our findings during an election cycle.

Yet here we are.

This issue is much larger than campaign slogans and talking points. It affects our quality of life, our ability to do business and how we feel about our community. For those we seek to shelter, it impacts their health, their outcomes and in some cases, their lives.

Regardless of the election, citizens have a right to know where we, the committee, are headed with this. Also, because it reflects citizen input, this report needs to become part of the public record.

Hopefully, our announcement today will put to rest the allegations that release of our findings is being deliberately delayed until after the May 9th election. Yes, the election cycle has complicated this important issue, but it has not interrupted our work.

We also realize there is keen interest in how this committee, and ultimately the MLAs, interpreted information gathered through the public process. A major part of public backlash to the rejected shelter locations was the lack of opportunity for taxpayers to have their say.

We were instructed by the MLAs to use public input, as outlined below, as our guide.

- Close to 16,000 signatures on two petitions against earlier shelter proposals
- 800 people who attended a public rally against the Quality Inn
- Several hundred emails and telephone calls that came into the two local constituency offices
- Neighbourhood canvassing conducted by MLAs Bing and Dalton.
- Advertised coffee meetings and meetings by appointment at the MLA offices
- Comment cards filled out by 700 plus citizens at the MLA's Have Your Say meeting.

This was our starting point.

Today, we are releasing our report to the public and to Dr. Doug Bing and Mark Dalton.

A few weeks back we also submitted a proposed location for the facility to BC Housing. Darin Froese will speak to that in a few minutes.

It is the committee's belief that the right model can go anywhere. Although our mandate was to select a location, we could not establish the suitability of a location without knowing what we were going to put there.

Our mandate also spoke to providing balance...Identify a suitable location with low impact to residents and business, while providing access to services for those utilizing the facility.

Working from the framework provided by citizens' input, the citizens advisory committee established the following parameters:

- Take care of the neighbourhood
- Take care of residents
- Take care of business

Our report today details fully what we feel should be the template for moving forward.

Here are a few highlights:

- No low barrier shelter
- No downtown location
- No location on Lougheed Highway or Dewdney Trunk Road
- One shelter, one operator
- Site selected should be away from single-family residences
- Crime that supports addiction will not to be tolerated
- Curfews will be in place with no in/out privileges past certain hours
- Non-profit group to provide oversight
- Citizens group to liaise with neighborhood and the facility

For our residents -

- Emphasis has been placed on provision of assessments, individual case management and a full suite of healthcare services designed to meet individual needs. Disability, mental illness and substance use disorders, in particular, should be managed in a manner befitting current evidence-based medical standards of care.
- Access to treatment on demand, based on community resources and availability.
- Path to life skills training and back to work programs, based on availability
- Access to public transportation, services and emergency services

Our written report articulates the criteria used in selecting the location now under consideration by BC Housing. However, what you have heard thus far doesn't begin to cover the full range of parameters considered.

INTRODUCE DARIN

I would now like to pass this off to Darin Froese, who will speak to the release of information related to location. Darin Froese is a former executive director of BC Housing and served on the Community Advisory Board of Regional Steering Committee on Homelessness (RSCH).

DARIN FROESE SPEAKS:

When locations are recommended/identified for shelters and social housing, typically information about the site is released after preliminary negotiations and due diligence. The land may need to be rezoned through a series of public hearings with municipal officials, and will also need the approval of BC Housing, who we understand do not make new project commitments during an election period. We also want to ensure taxpayers receive value, and we don't want the price of any potential site to become inflated just because the location was released before due diligence and approval by MLAs.

For the same reasons your city council goes behind closed doors to discuss property purchase, BC Housing is bound by legal obligations. Here is where we stand today: Location recommendations are now in the hands of BC Housing. If accepted by BC Housing, the location will move to the MLAs for decision. This decision moving forward will trigger discussions with the City of Maple Ridge and other partners. Then it will move to public consultation.

Release of the property before it is under contract could kill the deal. It could also cost taxpayers more money, should the seller opt to increase price because word gets out that government's deep pockets are involved.

If the location is not satisfactory, we would expect this committee would be reconvened to bring forth another location. Please remember that a huge part of our efforts have been directed, not only to location, but to a model that mitigates impact to the surrounding communities while meeting the needs of residents.

CHRISTINE

Thanks Darin. Next up is Rob Thiessen. Rob Thiessen is a recovery expert with years and years of experience in the operation of treatment centres and helping people off the streets. He also served on the board of 3030 Gordon from concept through to opening and operations.

ROB THIESSEN SPEAKS:

If you've been singing from the harm reduction/ low barrier choir book some of our ideas may sound foreign. But really, there's nothing new here. Many shelters operate within this kind of framework. Most shelters have curfews. Not all shelters in the Lower Mainland are low barrier. And not all are located in downtown areas—In Port Coquitlam, we operated successfully with a pick-up van for years.

Experts agree that low barrier shelters are effective as one part of an addiction and homelessness strategy, but by no means are they the only solution. This is something that experts also agree on. There is currently an extreme shortage of high barrier and drug free options, while the inventory of low barrier options has grown year over year. With this in mind, it's long past time that those who are not served by low barrier models be given access to a new model that works for them.

The template we are putting forth is not low barrier, but neither is it abstinence based.

That said, the existing shelter population must be integrated - with more thought given to providing services as opposed to coming in under a specific label.

Rest assured that we realize the importance of meeting people where they are. But more important - we don't want to leave them there.

C H R I S T I N E

Thanks, Rob. Although the points I brought up relate mostly to community impact, we spent the majority of our time considering how best to meet the needs of residents, particularly with respect to health care and ongoing services.

Committee member Dr. Paul Beckett is eminently qualified to speak on this topic. His experience includes prison medicine, addictions medicine and emergency room medicine. Paul currently sees patients at Alouette Addictions.

PAUL BECKETT SPEAKS:

When you read the full report you will note there are several key recommendations that attend to the health care needs of residents. Assessment, of course, is key. Allow me to bring forth some of the points in our report that I feel are of critical importance.

- ***Reasonable access to emergency services***
- ***On-site medical office. Fraser Health to provide infrastructure and contract the appropriate nursing, physician and social work personnel to service the medical needs of homeless people: Disability mental illness and substance***

use disorders will be managed in a manner befitting current evidence-based medical standards of care.

- *Requirement that Fraser Health Authority permanently provide in Ridge Meadows an Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) or an Intensive Case Management (ICM)*
- *Individual case management for supported housing*
- *Mandatory 360-degree assessment of social, physical and mental health status with agreement on appropriate and measurable treatment goals will be required at intake.*

C H R I S T I N E

Thanks Paul. I would like to thank Paul and all the committee members for their excellent work and diligence in compiling these findings. We have been extremely fortunate to have these three professionals, experts in their fields, help guide us through this process.

At this time, I would like to introduce the other members of our committee. Professionals in other areas, these three bring their own expertise when it comes to shelters and addictions.

Sandy Macdougall played a key role in the establishment of the Maple Ridge Treatment Centre. He also provides a viewpoint as a senior. Having experienced drug and alcohol addiction first hand, Sandy has celebrated 50 years of sobriety.

Lisa Sullivan, as a resident of Cliff Avenue, brings first-hand experience in neighbourhood impact. She holds a Classroom and Community Support Worker Diploma from Douglas College with a specialty in Behaviour Intervention.

Jesse Stretch, local business owner and a one-man force for good, has collected thousands of needles from local parks and schools and continues this work as a volunteer foot soldier in the fight against needle contamination.

I think I speak for all of us when I say this experience has been challenging yet gratifying. This is a very complex, often divisive issue and it weighed heavily on us that people were counting on our recommendations to ease the worries of a community and help those that are struggling with addiction and mental health issues.

I personally, have learned a lot through this process and feel blessed that I was able to work with all of the people around this table. I also want to thank those that cared enough to come speak to me at my office or on the street – we did not always agree but I am grateful that you cared enough to share your views and you should know that every one of them were considered and contributed in their own way.

I expect when people read the content of our report, there will be little doubt we have used our citizens' vision to formulate our guiding principles.

I also expect the first question asked will be “Is this what we’ll get?”

I can’t speak for Doug and Marc - and no doubt it will take them some time to digest the report that we’re presenting to them today.

As for members of the public that question the appetite for embracing our recommendations, I would like to read two short quotes, put in our hands as we began our deliberations:

First, from Premier Christy Clark, back in September 2016:

“What the government wants to do is find the model and the location that will work for the community. When Marc and Doug find a proposal they can support that is the one we are going to move on.”

On *December 5, 2016* Housing Minister and Deputy Premier Rich Coleman echoed the premier’s sentiments, saying:

“Input from residents would be the guiding factor in determining all aspects of the \$15 million purpose built shelter.”

I am confident our report reflects what the majority of people in our community want.

Thank you.