



Wachiay Friendship Centre

Mail: 1625 McPhee Avenue, Courtenay, BC, V9N3A6

Phone: [250] 338-7793 Fax: [250] 338-7287 Website: www.wachiay.org

Operating in the Traditional Territories of the Pentlatch,

Sahtloot, Sasitla, E'iksan, Yayaqwilta and K'omox Coast Salish People.

May 23rd, 2024

City of Courtenay
Kate O'Connell
Corporate Officer

Via email: koconnell@courtenay.ca

Dear Ms. O'Connell,

Thank you again for meeting with us, we appreciate your time and commitment to having an open dialogue with members of the Indigenous community. As promised, Wachiay would like to provide a response to the March 18, 2024 letter from Mayor Wells, and share a few thoughts about our meeting on April 30, 2024.

To start, we would like to synthesize what we heard from you. On behalf of Courtenay Bylaw, you feel that the process of researching and developing the new Park Bylaw was thorough and that the time spent consulting with community organizations was substantial.

Here is the Wachiay Friendship Centre position on the proposed Bylaw:

1. First, the Bylaw does not adequately account for people with health conditions or disabilities. People who are asked to leave encampments early in the morning can face additional challenges if they are not physically able to move easily. We heard from you that this issue is at the discretion of Bylaw officers who are rarely able to cover each location in a day. Nonetheless, because Bylaw Officers have the power to make consequential decisions, Wachiay would like to see more language in the policy outlining health and disabilities to protect vulnerable unhoused community members.
2. Second, we do feel that Indigenous peoples were not properly included in the consultation process. As per the 2023 Point in Time count for homelessness in the Comox Valley, 28% of the unhoused population identified as Indigenous. Wachiay staff met exclusively with Indigenous people who all communicated to varying degrees that the proposed Bylaws do not adequately align with Courtenay's commitment to DRIPA. We recommend that language in the Bylaw Amendment explicitly acknowledge and reference decolonization and the fact that the Courtenay area is on unceded territory.
3. Third, environmental factors should be listed as exemptions relating to encampments. On rainy or snowy days, with fewer people using the parks, it should be noted in the Bylaw that the unhoused can use public spaces for longer. While Bylaw officers are unlikely to require a tent to be taken down in the rain, it is important to have protections referenced in the Bylaw to ensure consistency.



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4. Finally, while Wachiay understands that it may be out of the scope of this Bylaw, we want to highlight the importance of creating systems that avoid removing tents and belongings without allowing for retrieval. We also want to stress the necessity for a managed encampment in Courtenay to help people step away from the cycle of poverty, displacement, and instability.

Wachiay is excited to move forward with Bylaw and the City of Courtenay. As new Bylaws are made by the City of Courtenay we emphasize the significance of integrating references to the Reconciliation Framework, Strategic Plan for Bylaw Compliance, and Bylaw Compliance Policy into all bylaws. While there are many benefits to the Bylaw Amendments, and it is a long-overdue process, there is still work to be done to ensure that the most vulnerable members of our community are protected.

In friendship,

Wachiay Friendship Centre

Roger Kishi
Coordinator- Homeless & Housing Programs

Dakota McGovern
Community Homeless Outreach Specialist

Caleb Burd
Poverty Law Advocate

Cc: Courtenay Council