



## Finding the Sweet Spot



Along with managing the public purse, Council has an obligation to use its legal tools (bylaws and policies) to create a fair, transparent, and consistent regulatory framework that will help us to achieve our vision of a vibrant and resilient community without unnecessarily impinging on individual residents rights and freedoms. This balance is sometimes difficult to find, especially when the public is generally distrustful of politicians and the political process.

The increasing use of shipping containers for temporary and permanent storage in residential and commercial areas is a good example of how challenging it can be to find the regulatory “sweet spot” that enables Council to protect the public interest while still respecting individual landowners’ private property rights. The use of these containers has been a challenge for communities all across Canada, and Quesnel is a latecomer in addressing this issue. Williams Lake and 100 Mile House do not allow shipping containers to be used in residential areas for permanent storage and both require permitting for temporary storage. Prince George allows them to be used for permanent storage, but only by permit and they must be enclosed in a structure. Quesnel has no regulations with respect to shipping containers.

Currently, any shipping container of any size, age, and condition can be permanently plunked down on any yard anywhere in the City. This means that your neighbor can put an aged out, rusty shipping container emblazoned with a shipping company logo in their yard in full view of your deck or kitchen window, and there’s nothing the City can do if you complain about it.

Most communities also restrict the use of shipping containers on commercial properties by requiring screening, and some don’t allow company logos to be displayed on containers even for temporary usage. Again, Quesnel has no such restrictions and shipping containers covered with company advertising can be found as permanent fixtures in different parts of our community.

In addition to the aesthetic issues associated with shipping containers, the Fire Chiefs of British Columbia published a report detailing serious safety hazards related to unvented shipping containers which have combustible materials stored in them. A volunteer fire fighter was killed when one of these containers exploded during a fire.

Since last fall, for these public safety and community aesthetics reasons, Council has been exploring different options for regulating the use of shipping containers in residential and commercial areas. We immediately informed the retailers of these containers that we were looking at regulating their use and we also conducted an online survey. However, there was limited and contradictory feedback in the survey results, so Council chose to advance a draft bylaw through first and second readings and hold a public hearing. This resulted in a full house at the public hearing, giving Council an opportunity to listen to the concerns of residents, primarily individuals who already have these containers on their property. Our policy committee will now work to incorporate this feedback into a new draft bylaw that will, once again, be subject to a public hearing.

If you have thoughts and ideas about how Council can find the regulatory “sweet spot” on this issue please email me directly at [bsimpson@quesnel.ca](mailto:bsimpson@quesnel.ca) or get in touch with any of the Councillors.

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