



City Council News June 26, 2019

We can't do what we can't do

The deep social issues impacting Quesnel are a result of multiple, complex issues that were not created by local governments and that are well beyond local government's capacity to fix. Simply put, local governments have limited powers and rights, and very limited financial resources. Local governments were created by the Provincial government to provide localized leadership for a defined geographic area and they have access to only one form of taxation: property taxes.

In the case of municipalities, Councils have discretion over the revenue they generate each year from property taxes, and they have discretion on how they spend that tax revenue through an annual budget engagement process and a Council vote. Regional Districts do not have general taxation discretion, Regional District Boards obtain taxation authority for specifically described functions through referendum.

Understanding the structure of local government is essential to a better understanding of what Councils and Boards can and cannot do with respect to the social issues we are experiencing today. In short, local governments have no control over the causes of the current problems, nor do they have control of the levers to directly deal with them.

For example, the decision to switch from a needle exchange program to a needle distribution program was made by the Federal and Provincial governments in 2002 based on advice from the World Health Organization. No amount of berating of local Councils to deal with the issue of discarded needles by going back to a needle exchange program will change the Federal and Provincial governments' decision.

If you don't like the current needle distribution program, tell the Province, the Federal Government, and the local health authority.

The same is true of the failure to timely prosecute people engaged in drug related property crime. The criminal code is Federal, the financing for the Court system is Federal and Provincial, and the priorities for prosecution are established by these governments. Local Councils have zero say in these matters.

If you don't like what's happening in the criminal justice system, tell the Federal and Provincial governments.

Likewise, local governments do not build shelters, supportive housing units, detox centres, or mental health facilities. We don't fund health care, food services, or methadone clinics. We barely have enough resources to do what we're supposed to do: fire protection, policing, water, sewer, garbage, roads, sidewalks, parks and recreation,

bylaw services, etc.

If you want more local resources for the homeless and for mental health and addictions services, tell the Province and Northern Health.

In short, constraints imposed on local governments by the constitution, by law, and by the Courts strictly limit our powers to directly address community safety concerns.

Despite these constraints, Quesnel City Council is fully engaged with multiple partners to try to facilitate the implementation of best practices here in Quesnel on two fronts: more robust services for the homeless and people suffering from mental health and addictions issues; and, more enforcement and prosecution services to protect the safety of the general public.

While we can't do what we can't do as a result of the structure of government in Canada, we are doing everything we can do. We're also using any political leverage we have to try and get changes made to the current system.

If you want to see changes too, please use your political leverage more pointedly and productively. Yelling on WTF Quesnel helps no one. Pointing your anger at City Council is unhelpful and misdirected. Taking the time to write the Premier, Prime Minister, and appropriate Ministers can have effect, if enough people engage in this process.

Mayor Bob Simpson

Email: mayor@quesnel.ca

Contact information

Prime Minister - Justin Trudeau - justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

BC Premier - John Horgan - Premier@gov.bc.ca

Ministers of Health

- Federal - Ginette Petitpas Taylor - Ginette.PetitpasTaylor@parl.gc.ca
- Provincial - Adrian Dix - HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Ministers of Public Safety

- Federal - Ralph Goodale - ralph.goodale@parl.gc.ca
- Provincial - Mike Farnworth - PSSG.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Minster of Justice

- Federal - David Lametti - David.Lametti@parl.gc.ca

Solicitors General

- Provincial - Mike Farnworth - PSSG.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Attorneys General

- Federal - David Lametti - David.Lametti@parl.gc.ca
- Provincial - David Eby - AG.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

- Provincial - Judy Darcy - MH.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

- Provincial - Shane Simpson - SDPR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Northern Health

- Chief Medical Health Officer - Dr. Sandra Allison - Sandra.Allison@northernhealth.ca
- Mental Health and Substance Use - MHSU.communications@northernhealth.ca