



3 North Shore Rd | P.O. Box 31  
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To: CAO  
From: Fire Chief Doug Knott  
Date: July 6, 2021  
Re: Zoning Amendment Bylaw for Community Services

Lake Cowichan Fire Department has great compassion for people who are living at or near the poverty level and struggling to provide for themselves and their family. Over the years we have raised thousands of dollars for local charitable organizations that assist this sector of our population.

This addition will increase the attraction of this sector of the population to our community and we can already see individuals staying around Saywell Park pavilion and camping near community services.

Attending to calls for overdoses etc. will increase the workload on our department and membership that has caused some members to no longer respond to these calls. We have seen a significant decrease in attendance to calls involving these vulnerable people due to the threat and fear of contracting illnesses and infections during these calls from not only the patients but the hazardous conditions that our crews enter to provide assistance.

We cannot afford to continue down this path of decreased attendance to medical calls as it will adversely affect our response to the rest of the public and the community who we serve. The concern is that if this were to go forward the workload would increase, attendance would decrease, and the long term effect would be less firefighters for our community.

There is a higher likely hood that many of the vulnerable population that we are treating at calls or incidents have a serious infection or communicable disease and for our safety we have to assume that this is the case and be prepared for that .Our personal protective equipment does not provide 100 % protection and there is a high chance of exposure for our members, we have protocols in place and do our best to keep safe. If a firefighter gets an exposure during an incident or call out there is a lengthy and arduous procedure for them and their family to follow until it is known whether or not they have contracted a disease or life altering illness from this exposure. They have to immediately go to the hospital and get tested, then be put on a drug cocktail with multiple unpleasant side effects. The patient if still alive and willing can give permission to be tested, but if deceased or unwilling their conditions remain unknown to our member , their doctor and changes the course of treatment. Currently we have one of our members going through this protocol as a recent call involved them having a potential exposure.

The Park area where this zoning application concerns has been a higher than usual incident area for us in the last 3 months. Call types have included, overdoses, illegal campfire, illegal cooking, illegal camping, reports of others staying in the brush (deemed too dangerous to search). This area is not only a public park, attended by many young children and families, but has Critical Infrastructure within it such as power lines to Youbou & North Shore Rd and river control gates.



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## Zoning Amendment Bylaw for Community Services Cont'd

In conversation with individuals staying in the park, the area is currently being encouraged by Community Services employees for them to stay there. Verbally telling them that they can stay there and supplying them with tents.

Supplying Tents is a very dangerous practice as many other municipalities have had tents burn up in encampments that house vulnerable populations, resulting in dangerous situations, injuries and deaths. Firefighters will be the group that attends these calls or incidents and will potentially add undue stress.

I have been through many meetings, training and education sessions dealing with this subject matter and have our own recent experiences here in town at the South Shore Motel, 3 to 4 years ago. Members of the current vulnerable population that are still here were allowed to stay at and manage the South Shore Motel. The living conditions in some rooms were almost to the point of being uninhabitable. We attended numerous calls there during that period, mostly overdoses some resulting in deaths, unsafe cooking dangerous storage practices, assistance with the RCMP and culminated with a call that put 5 young children and 2 adults in the Emergency ward at the hospital after they were exposed to noxious fumes from cooking illegal substances in adjoining rooms of the property.

I spoke with the attending Emergency Room Doctor who voiced grave concerns over the living conditions but due to the privacy laws could not tell me how bad or what the substance was that was being cooked and ultimately caused the exposure.

The information that I have been taught by the Fire Chiefs Association of BC (FCABC) and other training sources is that the proper services and ministries, (Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Housing) need to be involved to provide long term assistance and help to support this vulnerable population. It was also explained very clearly that a small town like ours will not be able to ever have these type of services available so it would be advisable to have them locate where they can get the help and services that they need.

Some individuals will never do this as I have spoke to many and they will not even get in an ambulance when they need and are advised to get medical help during an incident or emergency. They want to live their life under their rules not rules that would need to be followed in a controlled housing environment setting.

I reviewed the letters sent to voice support or non-support and see that the majority is not in support of the rezoning. I also did notice several of the supporting letters in favour of rezoning were from individuals not in our tax paying area,



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### Staff Report Zoning Application Cont'd

Lastly on a personal note I have visited the park from a non Fire Department side in order to get a different perspective. I rode into the park on a bicycle June 2, 2021, at approximately 7:00 pm. I encountered a 14 year old boy asking for my help. He was being harassed and pursued by an older female who in my opinion was very intoxicated. I called RCMP and she was later arrested, this person was new to our area in the prior 3-4 days.

Considering all of the above facts and information I have provided in this report , I would not recommend approving this rezoning application as it would not be a fit for the community based area that it is currently zoned for.

Please contact me if you have any questions or need more information on any of the items detailed in my report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Doug Knott".

/Doug Knott/  
Fire Chief  
Lake Cowichan Fire Department

