



Office of the Mayor

April 5, 2019

Member Municipalities
c/o Union of BC Municipalities
Suite 60 - 10551 Shellbridge Way
Richmond, BC V6X 2W9

Dear UBCM Member Municipalities:

I am writing on behalf of Maple Ridge City Council to inform you of recent action taken by the Province of British Columbia that undermines the authority granted to municipal governments, and request that you pass a resolution to be forwarded to Premier Horgan and the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) expressing concern for the impact this action has on the roles defined for local government within the Community Charter (CC) and the Local Government Act (LGA).

By way of background, I share with you the recent experience of the City of Maple Ridge, where on two separate occasions, we have been subjected to the Province's unilateral action to bypass local government autonomy and public process, inconsistent with our local zoning.

In May 2018, the Province of BC made application to the City of Maple Ridge to rezone provincially-owned properties on 11749 & 11761 Burnett Street (as referenced in Item 1108 of the May 22, 2019 Council Meeting Report) to build purpose built supportive housing. Citizens attended a public meeting hosted by local MLAs and presented a 10,000 name petition against this application citing several considerations that made the site unsuitable including its proximity to a daycare, two schools, a seniors centre, and that the proposed model itself was inadequate to meet the complex mental health and addiction support services required, particularly persons coming from a camp environment. Following the public process, the City rejected the application. The Provincial Government responded to this decision by taking unilateral action to install housing through the Rapid Response to Homelessness (RRH) program on a nearby provincially-owned site on Royal Crescent, next to senior and low income housing, without any local consultation citing emergency measures were needed to ensure camp closure, which did not happen.

Since this Council took office in November 2018, we have taken swift and deliberate steps to address mental health and housing problems in our community, especially with regard to the ongoing presence of the St. Anne Camp that was first established in May 2017. We have endeavored to open positive channels of communication with the Province of BC to deliver a workable plan that addresses immediate and long term housing needs in our community, while respecting the views that have been clearly stated by local citizens. This began with post-election meetings in October 2018 with our local MP, MLAs, Fraser Health Authority, BC Housing and related non-profit service providers followed by Council's development of a Strategic Plan which includes direction to establish a Community Safety Plan as a major tenet of this work. These steps have been followed up most recently with a meeting in Victoria on February 25, 2019 with Ministers we felt needed to be present to assist us in our plan, that being Ministers of Health, Mental Health and Addictions, Poverty and Housing to discuss a broad range of problems including housing affordability, delivery of addiction and mental health services, community safety, and how we can move forward on these matters in Maple Ridge.

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City of Maple Ridge

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On Monday, March 4, just one week after that meeting, I received a phone call from the Housing Minister demanding that the City deliver a "Social Housing Plan" within five days to address short and long term needs, including providing immediate housing to facilitate the closure of the St. Anne Camp. Council immediately passed a resolution and then delivered on this request in seven days, with all related resolutions from Council to demonstrate our willingness and commitment to collaborate for a mutually beneficial outcome. The Plan was immediately rejected by the Province. The Province cited the unsuitability of the City's chosen property, despite City staff's assessment that the site could accommodate immediate housing needs to achieve camp closure. One week later, Minister Robinson announced publicly that RRH housing would be installed on Burnett Street, at the same location local residents and the previous Council had already rejected through the usual local application process.

Maple Ridge Council is gravely concerned by this second instance of the Provincial Government overriding local autonomy. The initial 53 housing units installed on Royal Crescent did not end the St. Anne Camp as promised by the Province, with units populated by both camp residents and other homeless individuals identified by BC Housing as a regional housing provider. In five months' time, the facility has experienced two deaths, and seen few moving forward as evidenced by statistics provided by the operator. Increasing crime at this location, the St. Anne Camp, and all other low barrier facilities in Maple Ridge indicates that the chosen model is not suitable to help people in a very serious state of poor mental health often coupled with significant substance misuse problems. Moreover, we have seen that other communities working to address closure of camps experienced similar results (e.g. Nanaimo, Victoria, Surrey and now Maple Ridge).

The emphasis that has been placed on low barrier housing in Maple Ridge, which includes approximately 950 rental supplements for untreated persons mostly suffering from substance misuse and mental health problems, has eliminated most of our affordable housing stock that is critical for people on low income, veterans, seniors, single parents and persons with disabilities. Furthermore, ongoing criminal activity has overtaxed all front line resources. These are real and significant local concerns that have been swept aside by the Province's action.

What our community needs is a comprehensive health care facility focusing on mental and physical health, addictions recovery, and services to move people forward to a better place in their lives. We asked for this as part of our Social Housing Plan to the Province, a Plan which recognizes that local governments' role is to make decisions in the best interest of local residents. By acting unilaterally, the Province has imposed regional priorities at the expense of Maple Ridge citizens, and taken away our Council's ability to represent the best interests of our community.

We therefore ask you, our fellow local governments, to consider the ramifications of this unilateral action by the Province of BC to overrule municipal land use regulations and dispense with public consultation and collaboration with local government. In our view, it sets a dangerous precedent that jeopardizes the autonomy of all local governments in British Columbia, and could have repercussions for a wide range of sensitive matters that municipalities might consider, such as a waste incineration plant, a prison, a communication tower, etc. For projects such as these, it is particularly important that senior government initiatives go through proper process including site assessment and suitability evaluation, and for the Province of BC to respect the authority that has been granted to local governments to carry out due public process and represent the best interests of their communities in order to ensure approval.

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We appreciate that initiatives such as the RRH program may or may not be suitable in your community. Local government holds the authority and responsibility of making the right decisions based on a balance of all interests and weighing local and regional needs, while working with our senior government partners.

Enclosed you will find a proposed resolution that is strictly about the importance of local government autonomy. We ask that you consider passing this resolution and forward a copy to Premier Horgan and the UBCM to let them know that local governments require the Province of BC to respect local democracy and work collaboratively with us to move forward on projects and programs of mutual concern that balance the interests of all BC residents.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Morden
Mayor

Attach: Sample Resolution
Sample Letter to Premier Horgan

cc: Maple Ridge Council

Sample Resolution

WHEREAS the *Community Charter*¹ acknowledges that municipalities and their Councils are “democratically elected, autonomous, responsible and accountable”; require the authority to determine the public interest of their communities; and the *Local Government Act*² grants local governments the powers and flexibility required to fulfill their purpose and respond to the needs of their communities;

AND WHEREAS the Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing has taken unilateral action in Maple Ridge that undermines the jurisdiction of the Council of the City of Maple Ridge to determine and represent the public interest of this community, setting a dangerous precedent that jeopardizes the autonomy of all local governments in British Columbia in representing the interests of their communities through fair and accountable public process;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that [Enter Municipality] urges the Province of British Columbia to commit to work in collaboration with local governments within the bounds of their respective jurisdictions on all current and future projects of mutual concern to local governments and the Provincial Government.

¹*Community Charter*, SBC 2003, c.26, part 1

²*Local Government Act*, RSBC 2015, c.1, part 1

[Enter Date]

Premier Horgan
West Annex Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Premier Horgan:

Due to our concern over recent action taken by the Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing to undermine jurisdiction granted to municipal governments, the Council of [Enter Municipality] endorsed the following resolution on [Enter Date]:

WHEREAS the *Community Charter* acknowledges that municipalities and their Councils are “democratically elected, autonomous, responsible and accountable”; require the authority to determine the public interest of their communities; and the *Local Government Act* grants local governments the powers and flexibility required to fulfill their purpose and respond to the needs of their communities;

AND WHEREAS the Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing has taken unilateral action in Maple Ridge that undermines the jurisdiction of the Council of the City of Maple Ridge to determine and represent the public interest of this community, setting a dangerous precedent that jeopardizes the autonomy of all local governments in British Columbia in representing the interests of their communities through fair and accountable public process;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that [Enter Municipality] urges the Province of British Columbia to commit to work in collaboration with local governments within the bounds of their respective jurisdictions on all current and future projects of mutual concern to local governments and the Provincial Government.

We therefore urge the Government of BC to respect local government autonomy and engage in collaborative consultation with municipalities and constituents on any land use or other matters of concern to the Provincial Government.

Yours sincerely,

[Signatory]