

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Press Release

September 11, 2023

First Nations Leadership Council Expresses Grave Concerns Over Prince George Millennium Park Encampment Clearance

(X̱w̱məθḵwəy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵw̱x̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and sə̱lilwətaʔ/se̱lilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) — The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) condemns the recent actions taken by the City of Prince George to clear the Millennium Park encampment, which is home to at least 30 full-time residents. The FNLC expresses deep dismay and concern for the well-being of the unhoused individuals affected by this senseless and dehumanizing decision-making.

The FNLC asserts that the decision demonstrates a lack of empathy, compassion, and an alarming disregard for human rights. The following points underscore our concerns:

Contravention of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU): The Province and the City of Prince George recently signed an MOU known as the Heart and Hearth Agreement to address the homelessness crisis in Prince George collectively and humanely. In direct contravention of this agreement, Prince George City Council made decisions unilaterally without any engagement with residents, service providers, and First Nations.

Insufficient Housing: Prince George City Council maintains that they made the decision under the advisement that there are adequate and appropriate housing options for Millennium Park encampment residents. As of September 11th, 2023, it is reported that only four (4) of the 30 residents were provided housing, reinforcing further housing insecurity and inadequate resources for the remaining encampment residents to seek appropriate alternative shelter. Furthermore, additional supportive housing will be available in the coming months, forcing many Millennium Park residents to relocate unnecessarily.

City's Actions Show Bad Faith and Cruelty: The FNLC condemns the City of Prince George for what it views as bad faith negotiations, short-sightedness, and explicit cruelty in its decision-making process. Despite the Province's efforts to provide resources through the Heart and Hearth agreement, the City has not utilized these resources to date. The FNLC emphasizes that punishing those most impacted by unaffordable housing is not a solution to the housing crisis, and it breaks the trust established by the new Mayor and council members. As volunteers worked with encampment residents over the weekend to move their belongings, no city or provincial staff were present to support residents with the transition despite the unreasonable timelines. Furthermore, remaining encampment residents were met on September 11th with various city, RCMP and fire personnel with forceable removal, despite volunteers pleading to help the dehousing move their remaining belongings.

Political Exploitation of Vulnerable: The FNLC condemns the decision as a reprehensible attempt by city councillors to make political decisions in the wake of the downtown explosion at the expense of the most vulnerable.



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Structural Racism: The FNLC highlights the decision's manifestation of structural, systemic racism, with over 70% of the unhoused individuals being Indigenous. The City's targeting of Indigenous people for violence is unacceptable, and historical context regarding land and housing issues must not be overlooked.

Lack of Humane Removal Plan: The FNLC criticizes the lack of a humane plan for removing the encampment and notes that previous recommendations made by encampment residents were ignored. These recommendations were brought to the City of Prince George after the city staff unlawfully destroyed shelters at the legally protected encampment on Lower Patricia Blvd known as Moccasin Flats. The FNLC emphasizes that engaging with encampment residents and utilizing available resources from the Province could have led to a more constructive solution.

Inadequacy of Moccasin Flats: The FNLC underscores that Moccasin Flats is not an adequate solution, as it is already overcrowded, creating unrealistic expectations for accommodating all unhoused persons in Prince George.

Dehumanization of the Unhoused: The FNLC condemns the City's framing of the situation in terms of public safety, emphasizing that the safety of the unhoused has not been a genuine concern. Dehumanization and rejection of those in need of support are unacceptable.

Safety of Encampments: The FNLC highlights the lack of correlation between being unhoused and engaging in criminal activities. Encampments do not pose a significant threat to public safety, and the City's actions may exacerbate the challenges both unhoused and emergency responders face.

In light of these concerns, the FNLC calls upon the Prince George City Council to reconsider its decision and engage in good faith discussions to implement an evidence-based transition plan in a transparent and timely manner. The FNLC emphasizes the importance of treating all residents, including those without homes, with the dignity and respect they deserve.

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The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

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