

March 08 2021

Attention Mayor and City Council,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Desiree Franz, and I am writing to you on behalf of the population that will be displaced with the closure of Victory Shelter in Penticton, as decided by City Council, along with the many citizens of this community who are concerned with this decision. First let me start off by stating that I am writing this as an individual in this community. I do not represent any agency. While I do work for an agency that serves this population, my goal today is similar to yours, in that I hope to see homelessness eradicated in the City of Penticton.

As the Mayor and City Council did not attend the peaceful protest on Friday regarding the decision to close Victory Shelter, I am giving a chance to address the constituents of this community who are bringing forward the following questions about the imminent closure. We appreciate your attention to these questions and look forward to hearing your answers.

1. Have any of you personally attended a meeting with representatives of the organizations who provide the shelter services in Penticton? If so, would you be able to elaborate on what conversations you have had addressing the challenges of the essential community shelter services? Just for the record when were these meetings and in what capacity did you attend?
2. Could you explain the reasoning behind closing a full shelter resource during a health pandemic, when the offer to continue funding it with provincial dollars is there? What benefits will there be to the community to close this shelter and displace 42 people without alternative housing onto the streets of Penticton? You (Mayor Vassilaki) stated in multiple interviews last week that you would like to see more long-term solutions for housing in Penticton, and that this is one of the reasons you do not support an extension of the Victory Shelter being open, because it isn't a long term solution. Can you explain the benefits of closing the shelter this Spring before long-term solutions have been created? Can you tell us about how displaced people on the streets of Penticton will support the development of long-term solutions for housing?
3. Would you be willing to invite me to speak at the next City Council meeting, or to a private meeting with City Council members, so that you could listen to the voices of those that use and have used local shelter resources that spoke at the protest? There are several community members who shared their stories about accessing shelters in Penticton at some point in their lives and they would like to share with you about their opinions on shelter and housing in Penticton.
4. I understand, according to your interviews last week, that you want to see longer term housing solutions in Penticton for people who currently access shelter supports. What are you doing to support the development of affordable housing in Penticton? How are you supporting developers and local non-profit housing organizations to develop these essential housing developments? Are you working with the aforementioned in order to support the planning needed at the municipal level? Are you supporting these organizations in the form of collaborative meetings, planning and resource sharing in order to develop the best housing strategies possible for the City of Penticton? Please tell us more about this.
5. I understand, according to your interviews last week, that you want to see wrap around services in Penticton to support vulnerable people with long-term supports. What are you doing to support the development of wrap around services in Penticton? How are you supporting local health and non-profit organizations to develop these essential services? Are you working with the aforementioned in order to support the planning needed at the municipal level? Are you supporting these organizations in the form of collaborative meetings, planning and resource sharing in order to develop the best community strategies possible for the City of Penticton? Please tell us more about this.
6. Are you aware of how many low income housing units have been torn down in Penticton in the past 10 years? Are you aware of how much Affordable Housing has been developed in the past 10 years

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to replace these units? Are you aware of what Penticton's average population growth is? Are you aware of the percentage the cost of housing has increased by in our region over the past 10 years? Are you aware of the implications that the current Economic Recession is having on housing for people living in relative poverty? Are you aware of how many people in Penticton live on a yearly family household income of \$25,000 or less? Are you aware that there are youth (age 24 and younger) and seniors (age 55 and older) accessing the general shelters in Penticton?

7. You (Mayor Vassilaki) claimed in multiple interviews last week that you were not told about the Victory Shelter being opened "until the 11<sup>th</sup> hour". In fact, the location was given to your city planners months in advance of the final decision, and they played a role in the decision to have the current Victory Shelter as the location. There were multiple other locations discussed but they were deemed not suitable through an inter-agency committee. Are you claiming that you had no knowledge of the locations your city planners were working with this entire time?

8. You (Mayor Vassilaki) claimed in multiple interviews last week that there has never been a tent city before when the winter shelter closes in Penticton. However in fact, every year there is a tent city in Esplanade Park and city workers are instructed to tear it down dispersing and displacing the individuals multiple times throughout the Spring and Summer months. The individuals are forced to wander and then eventually return to Esplanade and other city trails as there is no where else for them to go. Are you saying that you are unaware that your city workers complete this task every year, to tear down homeless encampments in Esplanade Trail? So perhaps you are also unaware of the costs the city incurs to tear-down the homeless encampments? Would you say it is more than that zero dollars it costs the city to allow a shelter, paid for by Provincial dollars, to stay open?

9. Are you aware of how much tax dollars are spent on policing, bylaw and health services during the months that the temporary winter shelter exists versus the months that they have been traditionally shut down?

10. You (Mayor Vassilaki) have been referring to a "Safety Committee" about coming up with long term solutions for housing in Penticton. Can you tell us a little more about this Safety Committee and what their roles are, and how you have been working with them to develop long term housing in Penticton?

Thanks to Mayor Vassilaki and City Council for your time and attention to these important issues that heavily impact our city. We, like many cities in British Columbia, are being heavily impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the Overdose Crisis and by current economic recession. Collaborative solutions are needed now more than ever to support our city to thrive and our most vulnerable community members to stay adequately supported, which will in turn mitigate unnecessary strain on emergency services and taxpayer dollars.

Some messages that Penticton residents with Lived Experience of Homelessness brought to the protest:

