

## MEDIA ADVISORY

### Chamber comments on possible extension of seasonal emergency shelter in Kelowna

*Kelowna:* Tom Dyas, President of the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce, has been meeting with stakeholders from the downtown business community, local government, the John Howard Society, BC Housing, the RCMP and other parties to review the options for the temporary shelter on Leon Street.

The shelter is currently scheduled to close at the end of March although there has been some recent discussion of an extension, given the need to serve these marginalized individuals.

Meanwhile, downtown businesses have been increasingly concerned about the disruptions caused to their businesses – both to staff and customers – by the influx of people using the shelter and some related illegal activity that is now occurring near the property.

“Our members fully understand the need for the City and BC Housing to take a leadership role in providing emergency shelter to those in need,” said Dyas. “We support those efforts and the work of the service providers, but with that said we don’t believe this is a long-term solution. We believe a dispersed model where there are a few smaller shelters would be superior in providing a healthy environment for those seeking help and it would have less impact on the surrounding businesses.”

The Chamber has heard from some downtown businesses which are concerned about a possible extension at the current location because of the rise in safety concerns stemming from a small number of people who are involved with nuisance and vandalism, and some who are engaged in criminal activity in the area. In that regard the Chamber supports all parties in looking for other locations for a long-term solution as it is clear the current location has its challenges, given it was never meant to be a shelter nor house as many individuals as it now is.

The Chamber has asked BC Housing to reconsider and explore other possible locations in the City that would be safer for those seeking help and for those who work in the area.

“We are optimistic that a collaborative effort involving the City, BC Housing and the downtown business community will result in the identification of a more suitable location for an emergency shelter that can be put in place prior to next winter,” says Dyas.

“Unfortunately, it appears the current temporary shelter has brought more street crime to the area and as a result, there have been increased break-ins and property damage, along with an increase in

fear among those who work in the area,” said Dyas. “We appreciate the willingness of BC Housing and the City to consider increased security in the short-term while being open to looking at other locations that would more adequately serve the individuals using the shelter.”

The Chamber and others have offered to assist both with searching for other more suitable locations for such a shelter while also participating with all parties in the creation of a Good Neighbour Agreement that would more accurately address the concerns and expectations with the goal of ensuring the safe operation of the shelter with minimal negative impact on its neighbours.”

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