

MAY 15, 2023**CITY COUNCIL MEETS WITH BC MINISTER OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTIONS AND MLA BABCHUK**

City of Campbell River Mayor, Kermit Dahl, members of Council, and City Manager, Elle Brovold, met with the Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and MLA Michele Babchuk, on Wednesday, May 3, 2023, in Victoria. The meeting was an opportunity for the City and the Ministry to discuss potential collaborations on safe and effective approaches to address harms associated with substance use in the Campbell River community as well as the rationale for the City bringing forward the proposed Public Nuisance Amendment Bylaw No. 3898, 2023 (consumption of controlled substances in public spaces).

Council identified a need for health services, including improved access to safe consumption sites, treatment and recovery options, as well as funding to ensure that these services are integrated in a way that limits the unintended financial and social consequences of these uses on the surrounding neighbourhood. Minister Whiteside committed to creating a working group that will include representatives from the Ministry, Island Health, First Nations and the City, to address concerns raised.

The proposed bylaw prohibits the consumption of controlled substances within 15 metres of any playground, sports field, tennis court, picnic shelter, water park, skate park or covered bus shelter, and at 12 City facilities that are considered to be locations of importance to the community. The bylaw was given first and second reading at the April 27, 2023 Council Meeting and after connecting with both the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and Island Health, will consider it for third reading in the first Council Meeting in June.

“Council appreciated the opportunity to meet with the Minister and relay the feedback that we hear from residents, businesses and visitors on a daily basis,” says Mayor, Kermit Dahl. “Campbell River continues to experience increasing levels of public disorder due to substance use, mental health challenges and homelessness, and the related impacts on community safety and downtown revitalization efforts are significant. Following this meeting, the City and the Ministry are in a better position to work together to address the community’s needs.”

Council also received a presentation from Dr. Reka Gustafson, Chief Medical Health Officer for Island Health, and Dr. Charmaine Enns, Regional Medical Health Officer, at the May 9, 2023 committee of the whole meeting and looks forward to their involvement in the working group.

Moving forward, Council looks forward to continued dialogue with the Ministry on this topic and other opportunities to work collaboratively to address these challenges.

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