



December 12th, 2023

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to you today to express my concerns with the decision to proceed with the seasonal emergency weather shelter to be located at the Cowichan Community Center. Please first and foremost understand that we are by no means objective to the citizens of the Cowichan Valley that require assistance during these trying times, we also agree whole heartedly that a warm and dry shelter is an absolute critical need during this time of year.

Cowichan Valley Minor Hockey Association is a long-term user group of the Cowichan Community Centre. Our association is home to 350+ athletes ranging from 4-18 years of age. We utilize the Cowichan Community Centre six days per week, ranging in times from 6:00am to 10:20pm.

In recent years it has become increasingly uncomfortable and unsafe for our athletes to attend their scheduled events at CCC – whether this be morning ice, or evening ice. The homeless population as we all know has drastically increased; and brought with it substantial drug use, overdoses, crime, drug paraphernalia, human excrement, loitering, and individuals suffering with mania, psychosis, and anger who often lash out.

The CCC grounds are already a host to much of the homeless population. This is a clear visual for anyone who is using the facility on a frequent basis. We have children who can no longer walk into the arena unattended, and we have older teenagers hesitant to walk out to their vehicles alone at night. We have coaches and managers who stay behind to ensure everyone makes it out safely.

While the above does come with its own set of challenges, we have made it work. Maintenance and Security at CCC do a fantastic job of ensuring doors are locked, and the user groups are safe inside. The problems to date for the most part have remained outside.

But now, due to Bill 31 and the decision made by the CVRD – the problem is being moved inside. Inside a community facility that hosts thousands of children from varying user groups, every single day.

This raises valid, immense, and immediate concerns for Cowichan Valley Minor Hockey Association and all our members; we have a duty to ensure their safety and wellbeing, in addition to fostering their growth and development through their love of hockey. For many of our members, being on the ice is their comfort zone.

This situation begs answers to the following:

1. Under Bill 31 the province has the authority to mandate emergency shelters. The CVRD did not want to see the province step in and mandate a location beyond the CVRD's control, so took matters into their own hands.

What other locations were explored prior to delegating Heritage Hall, and why weren't any of those locations' feasible options? Surely there are locations within the CVRD that are not home to 1000's of children's extracurricular activities?

2. Who will be responsible for ensuring that the current homeless problem surrounding the CCC location will not be made far worse with the addition of the emergency shelter? What additional steps and resources will be utilized to ensure the comfort and wellbeing of all those concerned?

3. Will additional security measures be put in place to ensure that all patrons are able to safely arrive to and leave the facility?

4. Under regular circumstances, most entry ways in to CCC are locked in the evenings preventing the homeless population from entering the arena. With the addition of a warming shelter, will the users of the warming shelter have access to other areas of the arena? Such as late night U18 practices or 6am competitive level practices? If CCC has already been forced into a position in which the doors must be locked to ensure user group safety – how will the addition of a warming shelter within the facility NOT be counterproductive to this?

5. It is safe to assume that there will be an increase in drug paraphernalia and open usage surrounding the arena now – what measures will be put in place to prevent or limit this increase?

6. Should an incident involving someone from the shelter and one of CCC's user group members occur, where will the responsibility fall? Is there additional insurance or similar in place to protect the user groups?

7. Why was there zero consultation or communication with the affected user groups of the Cowichan Community Center?

As previously mentioned, we are not ignorant to the fact that an emergency warming shelter is needed – but as a long-term user of the facility, we do need to know what steps have been taken to ensure the safety of all concerned. With the lack of transparency surrounding this issue, it leaves no alternative but to feel that existing user groups were not taken into consideration whatsoever. Our Cowichan Valley youth have been subjected to an entire new level of existence in recent years, one that is getting harder and harder for parents to protect them from, while our local government slowly yet effectively reduces the few remaining safe places our youth currently have, such as their extra-curricular activities.

We applaud the CVRD for being proactive to ensure that there is a plan in place; but must clearly state that we at Cowichan Valley Minor Hockey Association, and on behalf of our 350+ members strongly oppose the chosen location of Heritage Hall for an emergency warming shelter.

Respectfully,

Cowichan Valley Minor Hockey Association Executives