

May 11, 2020

Adrian Dix  
Minister of Health  
Province of BC  
PO Box 9050  
STN Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC  
V8W 9E2

Susan Brown  
President and CEO  
Interior Health  
505 Doyle Avenue  
Kelowna, BC, V1Y 0C5

Minister Dix and Ms. Brown

The Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce wishes to express its disappointment with the announcement that the Interior Health Authority will open an overdose prevention site in downtown Vernon.

On May 17, 2019, representatives from the Chamber met with Interior Health to discuss an OPS and the Chamber was clear that it did not want such a facility in downtown Vernon and that has not changed one year later. In fact, our members are still extremely concerned that an OPS in the downtown core will compound existing safety concerns and decrease property values. As we indicated last year, business owners are compassionate and they want individuals to access the help they need, but the location of an OPS in the downtown core could compound already existing challenges such as drug use, loitering and the perception that downtown is not safe.

We do not question the public health care emergency in B.C. and that overdose prevention sites are part of the strategy to save lives. However, we strongly believe that the appropriate location for an OPS is Vernon Jubilee Hospital, which provides a range of services, particularly during emergency situations.

It should also be pointed out that along with the Chamber of Commerce, the City of Vernon and the Downtown Vernon Association were opposed to a downtown OPS and they requested that it be at the hospital. Interior Health's announcement of May 11, 2020 goes directly against the clear direction identified by the community's elected officials and leading business organizations.

Interior Health is notifying the neighbours of an OPS at the Downtown Primary Care Centre and proposing a public open house, but these actions aren't sufficient. We would urge Interior Health to have immediate discussions with the City of Vernon and business organizations, including the

Chamber of Commerce. Among the issues to be addressed is how loitering will be handled to minimize the impact on businesses and their customers. This is of concern as the current Covid-19 pandemic may restrict how many people can be inside the facility at any one time. There also needs to be a discussion about the hours of operation (proposed 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.) and whether this is best for the facility's clientele and the adjacent businesses.

The determination of a suitable location for the OPS is critical to the success of the program, as is the acceptance of the SOP by businesses and the community at large. Interior Health clearly needs to come back to the table.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to discussing our request with the Ministry of Health and Interior Health.

Sincerely,

Krystin Kempton, President  
Greater Vernon Chamber of Commerce

cc. Eric Foster, Vernon-Monashee MLA  
Victor Cumming, Mayor of Vernon  
Coun. Kari Gares, City of Vernon rep to the Chamber  
Susan Lehman, Downtown Vernon Association  
Colleen McEwan, IHA director of clinical operations  
Dr. Karen Goodison, IHA medical health officer