

June 24, 2021

This letter is in response to the Daybreak North interview with Mayor Ackerman

Many of the Mayors' statements in the Daybreak North interview are incorrect or misleading and some are sensationalized to garner support from the public.

First of all the Mayor was incorrect in stating that the agreement that ended was a 5 year agreement . It was a 3 year agreement signed in 2017 (not 2015 as stated by the Mayor). The agreement signed in 2015 was a 2 year agreement. There had been several conditions that had to be met in the 2015 agreement (move from our \$100,000 deficit to creating a reserve fund for future needs). This was accomplished by 2017 which led to the 3 year contract.

In December the city proposed a 5 year agreement to replace the existing 3 year agreement. It seems strange that the city would propose a longer agreement if they were dissatisfied with the running of the facility.

The Management Services Agreement came up for renewal in November of 2020, which is accurate. Normally the city begins negotiating a new agreement in June 2020. Instead, the city waited until the agreement had expired before they brought a proposed agreement in December and we began the negotiations process in good faith. The Cultural Society and city were actively negotiating this new agreement and it was basically ready to be signed in February except for a few clerical errors noticed by the Society and was sent back for correction. In March we were informed by the Director of Community Services that the Mayor requested meeting with herself and the city's chief administrative officer as well as the regular people involved in negotiating. It was not until the Mayor and CAO showed up at this meeting that any issues or concerns around the library or managing the cultural centre were raised. Normally this is not a meeting the Mayor would attend and in fact no Mayor had been a part of the service agreement negotiations in the past.

The Mayor's main issue seemed to be around the Library, which the Mayor's husband was the Chair of the Library Board at that time. In the spirit of good faith and believing we were engaged in meaningful discussions with the City Administrative Office and Mayor, as we had been prior to this with their appointed representatives for negotiating, we offered the Mayor a solution that would eliminate any payment from the library thereby ensuring the financial viability of the Library. She was supposed to take that away to consider. So, for the Mayor to say in her interview that there was "no consideration of any kind of relief in any of our meetings that the city staff had with us," simply is not true. We were unaware that it was an issue until it was brought to our attention in March. We came up with a plan, which we posed to the CAO, to give the Library free rent if the city would pick up the operating costs for the Library's area that the Cultural Centre was currently paying. Further to that, during Covid, there was a government program where renters only had to pay 25% of their rent. This was available to them however they did not take advantage of it.

The Mayor tries to sensationalize that the library was being charged commercial rates. The library's per square foot rate equates to about \$9.00. While researching commercial spaces to rent for a separate

arts and cultural project, I have discovered rates to be from \$12 to \$21 per square foot and the renter is responsible for their own utilities, maintenance and janitorial. The Cultural Society pays for all of the library's utilities, which is not cheap for that size of space. We also pay their telephone and internet, garbage, and we provide snow removal, bathrooms and supplies, as well as janitorial and any minor non capital maintenance. The rates being charged to the library were neither exorbitant nor unfathomable and actually only accounts for 13% of their budget. Also on March 25, 2020 the Mayor's husband (Chair of the Library Board) sent an email to our Society saying the Library was no longer going to pay their rent. We tried to meet with them but they declined.

The Mayor alleges that people have reached out to them saying that the facility has been sliding into oblivion for well over a decade. There have also been some allegations about safety issues not being dealt with. (2:19) The city owns the building. The Mayor says that later in the interview and also acknowledges, and I quote: (7:50) "We are already responsible for **all** of the capital and a significant portion of any major maintenance issues that come about." If they believed the facility was unsafe and sliding into oblivion, they had an ethical obligation to make any capital and major maintenance repairs to their building rather than being negligent and potentially risking public safety. There was a major problem with the heating system in the library and it took the city over two months to repair.

In the interview, the Mayor said "we really do need this center to be open to all." When asked if what she was saying was that the Centre was not open to all at this time, she changed the subject and started talking about room rental income. There were 101 days in 2020 (a Covid year) where the theatre was in use. (I address what was happening later on.)

The Mayor talks about reaching out to Youth at Risk. It should be noted that many of the support letters written are from youth that grew up in the Cultural Centre and found it a place of safety and acceptance. The Centre has over the last few years been the host space for Magic The Gathering and Pokemon collecting and trading games. There is also a free Let's Art program (visual arts- painting, drawing, etc.) that runs for kids 6-12 and 12-18.

The Mayor talks fondly of her past musical experience. The Centre was the practice space for some of the band classes when they ran out of space or had flooding issues. This is no longer necessary as they have built and moved into a forever space. They do still need a presentation space which the Centre provides.

The Mayor sensationalized the fact that the Society rents out meeting rooms to "For Profit" organizations and that the non profits simply can't afford these rates. The Centre has always had a non profit rate alongside it's commercial rate. The City does the very same thing at the Leisure Pool, the Kids Arena and the Pomeroy Sports Center. According to their published bylaw #2460 it would cost an adult non profit group \$272 to rent a meeting room at any of these three city facilities for an 8 hour day. It would cost the same non profit organization \$185.60 to rent a meeting room from the Cultural Centre for the same time period. That is a savings of almost a hundred dollars a day from what the city charges. A "for profit" group could rent the same meeting room from the cultural society for \$232 rather than the \$520 the city would charge them. This means that the city charges non profit organizations more to

meet in their rooms than the Centre charges for businesses to meet in ours. Perhaps more appropriately the city should be chastising us for not having exorbitant rates for non profit groups like they do. How can the city criticize us for what we charge non profit groups when they charge out their rooms at a 33% premium above what we charge. The city would have the public believe it will cost non profit groups less in the future to rent space at the cultural centre but it is more likely they will elevate the prices to align with their present day gouging of non profit groups at their other facilities. This monopoly of rental space is very concerning. The city could have stepped up to the plate long before now and helped non profit groups have "affordable" access to meeting rooms, I'm not just talking about arts and cultural groups like the city is. There are lots of other worthy non profit groups out there like the Heart and Stroke Foundation, United Way, etc. that may want to use their meeting rooms. They shouldn't have to be gouged to finance the sporting facilities in this community.

The Mayor says that we are (5:30) "not adopting to a young community." When a daycare was shutting down and new spaces were needed, for before and after school programs, the Centre had everything in place in two weeks time to accommodate that need.

The Mayor said in the interview that the Library will be closing down in October. Is this accurate or is this just another sensationalized statement? We have not seen anything on the Library website or in any communication that this will be happening. If this is a true statement, does the city intend on taking over the library as the existing one, run by the library board, or will it close down in October (according to the Mayor) and cease to exist?

During the interview, the interviewer mentioned that the Society had fundraised to purchase the land and renovate the building and the Mayor said no.

Carolina brings up(6:03) "they fundraised to upgrade the theatre. No you say. "That building belongs to the city there was no purchase of land."

This is not true. The Society did a lot of fundraising \$3.4 million to be exact. They had to get a loan from the City for \$800,000 to finish the project which was paid off by 2012. It should be noted here that Peace Liard Regional District purchased the land and old Bay building which was turned over to the Arts Council to renovate. In the late 90's when larger cost maintenance items became an issue the building was sold to the City for \$1.

Another inaccurate statement is: "Right now We are already contributing \$260,000 a year as a grant in aid. So our staff that we would take on would not reach that amount". This is not true. Only \$220,000 is deposited into our account from the city and is now called a fee for service. If the \$260,000 is what the Council has authorized there are questions that need to be asked as to where the other \$40,000 goes.

The Mayor compares the Cultural Centre to a bus station (2:25) It is quite obvious to anyone that enters the Cultural Centre that this is not true. The Mayor does not even have to enter the Centre to know that is not true. The Mayor could read the reports, that are provided to the City quarterly, which show that the Society has not just maintained but improved the premises. Some of the improvements since the new board and management team took over in 2015 include but are not limited to the following:

renovation of the art gallery, new lighting in the theatre, repainted and recarpeted the conference room, renovated the Cafe' and added new appliances, In 2019 the Society raised money and completely renovated the theatre with new carpet, paint, curtains and seats. The concourse was also revamped with new carpet on the stairs and upper gathering space, new tables and chairs, and added artwork from local indigenous artists on the walls

Why does the Mayor have all these issues that nobody else has raised to the Society? Where is the documentation and why did these alleged concerns only surface after the library chairs wife showed up at the March meeting?

The Mayor states "Even our (7:00) FSJ Seniors care foundation providing online concerts for the seniors during Covid, could have been going on through the cultural society." At this point it should be noted that the Cultural Centre started a YouTube channel (search North Peace Cultural Centre) that presently has 85 videos that are entertainment and/or instructional in nature. (One is the Mayor reading a story time book). "The North Peace Festival of the Arts" was held virtually , which included 100's of entries from BC and Alberta. This took many days of taping to prepare for the judges, there have been virtual recitals, a virtual judged art show and many days of taping and providing stage space, lighting and sound for individuals to enter other performing arts competitions or virtual recitals.

Carolina questions(7:30)" Very briefly What will the costs of this be, now that the city will be responsible for 100% of this cultural society." The Mayors response "Because we have a lot of the staff in place already.....So at this point in time I can't give you a dollar amount but I can tell you that having an opportunity for people to have access to a facility in our downtown and to have our youth engaged in an appropriate and adequate activities is absolutely worth what it is going to take." (unlimited budget) The Cultural Centre Budget is close to \$1 million on a regular year. A large portion of the expenses will not go away if the City takes over. Their wages alone, for the same # of staff will be much higher as their base wages are more than ours.

It is unfortunate how little the Mayor, Council and City Managers actually know about what goes on at the Centre. It leaves the Society worried for our user groups that their needs will not be understood or met by this proposed takeover.

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