Public Policy Positions Manual

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Introduction

This manual documents the official public policy positions adopted by the Board of Directors of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce.

Its purpose is to provide Directors, staff, members, elected officials, partner organizations, and the public with a clear understanding of the Chamber's position on issues affecting the local business community.

These positions guide the Chamber's advocacy activities, government relations, public communications, policy submissions, and collaboration with the British Columbia Chamber of Commerce, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, neighbouring Chambers of Commerce, and other partner organizations.

The Chamber's advocacy is member-driven, evidence-based, non-partisan, and focused on creating a stronger business environment that supports long-term economic prosperity. Advocacy issues are identified through member engagement, committee work, economic analysis, and emerging public policy issues, then researched by staff and reviewed by the Advocacy Committee before being approved by the Board of Directors.

Policy Pillars (Categories)

The Chamber's advocacy is organized around six policy pillars that encompass the majority of the advocacy issues, policy positions, and resolutions it develops and advances on behalf of the business community.

1 – Housing & Land Use

2 – Community Safety & Security

3 – Affordability and Competitiveness

4 - Transportation & Infrastructure

5 – Economic Development Initiatives

6 - Agriculture, Natural Resources & Environment

Pillar 1 – Housing & Land Use

The Chamber supports housing and land-use decisions that increase the availability, diversity, attainability, and long-term supply of housing while supporting orderly development, business confidence, community safety, and economic growth.

A healthy business environment requires housing that enables employees, students, entrepreneurs, families, seniors, and vulnerable residents to live within or near the community.

The Chamber recognizes that housing policy affects:

- workforce recruitment and retention;
- business expansion;
- household spending;
- student enrolment;
- construction and development;
- community safety;
- tourism and accommodation;
- social stability; and
- the overall competitiveness of Penticton.

The Chamber supports practical, timely, and compassionate housing solutions while recognizing the need to assess impacts on existing residents, businesses, neighbourhoods, and local infrastructure.

Workforce Housing

Issue

Employers require access to an adequate supply of attainable housing to recruit and retain workers.

Housing shortages and high housing costs can:

- limit the available workforce;
- increase employee turnover;
- make seasonal recruitment difficult;
- constrain business growth;
- increase commuting pressures; and
- weaken the community's competitiveness.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports policies and investments that increase the supply and diversity of workforce housing in Penticton and the South Okanagan.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- increased construction of rental and ownership housing;
- a range of unit sizes and housing forms;
- efficient development-approval processes;
- housing near employment, transit, education, and services;
- partnerships involving government, nonprofit, Indigenous, and private-sector organizations;
- appropriate use of public land for housing;
- incentives that encourage viable workforce-housing projects; and
- infrastructure investment that supports responsible growth.

Intended Outcome

A housing market that improves workforce availability, supports business growth, and enables employees to live within the communities where they work.

Status: Active / ongoing

November 17, 2022

Mayor Julius Bloomfield
Cc: Donny van Dyk, Chief Administrative Officer
City of Penticton

171 Main St., Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

To His Worship, Mayor Bloomfield,

Re: Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce policy statement on housing development

Championed by the Chamber's Advocacy Committee, we wanted to take this opportunity to share with you the Penticton Chamber's policy on housing development. The purpose of this policy is to not only convey our position and some of the initiatives we would like to see, but to also open dialogue between our two organizations in order to look at the best solutions available to tackle this far-reaching and complicated issue through a multi-faceted lens.

On behalf of the Chamber's Members and Board of Directors, we thank you for taking the time to review our policy, and look forward to speaking further on this.

Housing affordability remains a challenging issue in Penticton, and as accessible housing becomes scarcer, businesses and the local economy suffer from a lack of workers in all areas, especially service, food and wine industry, and tourism. Demand for housing is outgrowing housing supply in both new builds and available rentals.

Penticton is in a crisis when it comes to housing availability and affordability. This crisis has a direct link to the lack of inventory and this crisis can only be addressed through approval of multi-unit proposals. The shortage of housing and subsequent rising costs for either renting or purchasing a home in the last few years has had a significant impact on local businesses to hire and retain employees, and for business owners themselves to find housing that is affordable. This negative impact has caused some local businesses to reduce hours and/or limit available services, and even caused some to close altogether. We fear that this will have a significant and long-term detrimental effect on the overall health of our community.

Increasing supply is a well-recognized means of managing rising home prices. The rising cost of housing has been noted to be a barrier to the attraction and retention of all types of labour, including having a detrimental effect on attracting workers from out of province and in fulfilling housing requirements for work permit immigration applications. Many local businesses are reporting that the labour shortage is a primary concern and is negatively impacting their business.

The Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce recommends the City of Penticton explore the following solutions:

- Develop appropriately located and sized city-owned land, that is otherwise unused, into accommodations aimed at providing accommodations for the workforce and operated by a non-profit society while offering below market-value rent.
- Encourage and add housing through the use of modular units, including parking lots where private landowners have not yet decided what to do with their properties (sell or develop). Modular residential units are manufactured off site thereby reducing costs and once they have been transported to their final destination, they are relatively fast to install. The units can also be removed and sold if and when the property owner chooses to do something different with their property, and can be stacked on top of each other making the most use of the otherwise vacant space.
- Ensure that an appropriate variety of bachelor suites and 3-bedroom units are incorporated into new apartment builds to increase much needed inventory of two key targets – bachelor suites for the younger, single demographic needed for entry level jobs, and 3-bedroom units to attract families looking to relocate here, or are not yet able to purchase a home.
- Review the historical success of incentives the City has offered in the past, such as tax deferrals and economic incentive zones, and implement opportunities that would encourage developers to increase housing inventory in more affordable areas within the City rather than those areas with the highest rates of returns, such as lake views or with walking distance to the beach.

The Penticton Official Community Plan (OCP) ratified in 2019 outlines the expected population growth in Penticton and resulting need for additional homes. The OCP recommends that the city add a minimum of 150 housing units per year until 2046, but this was reflective of an average annual growth rate of 0.65% per year. The 2021 census data has revealed the City's population grew 9.3% between 2016 and 2021, averaging out to 1.86% each year, almost three times the average annual growth rate anticipated by the OCP. The Chamber recommends that council and city staff revisit the OCP and update the housing requirements accordingly to reflect this surprising increase in population to support increased housing policy moving forward. We do not want to see the City of Penticton become a less desirable "place to stay forever". As a city we should develop a long-range made-in-Penticton plan that will sufficiently increase the supply of all types of housing. The OCP needs to accurately reflect Penticton's rate of population growth when determining zoning.

With all of these points in mind, the Chamber endorses a housing policy that reflects an emphasis on increasing supply. In doing so, the Chamber has developed the following guiding principles in deciding which developments to support:

1. **Residential development and housing.** Provide the opportunity for new growth and housing options for all age and socioeconomic groups ensuring a healthy mix of price ranges to reflect the community composition and conform with the current official OCP.

2. **Economic development.** Work to strengthen and diversify a sustainable economic and employment base for the city.

3. **Infrastructure and services**. Improve and support the development of new infrastructure, including transportation, with a view to improving the livability of the area for those who work and reside in Penticton.

4. **Natural environment**. Steward and protect the area's natural features and heritage design where possible, and always protect sensitive and endangered ecosystems and species.

The Chamber will use the above guiding principles to direct and inform our discussions around proposed developments.

Sincerely,

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

185 Lakeshore Drive W
Penticton, B.C. V2A 1B7
778-476-3111

Student Housing

Issue

A shortage of purpose-built student housing can place additional pressure on the local rental market and limit the ability of post-secondary institutions to attract and retain students.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports investment in purpose-built student housing at Okanagan College's Penticton campus and other appropriate locations.

Student housing can:

- improve access to education;
- reduce competition for conventional rental housing;
- support local employers seeking trained workers;
- increase student participation in the local economy;
- support institutional growth; and
- strengthen Penticton as an education centre.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- timely completion of approved student-housing projects;
- continued provincial investment;
- integration with transportation and community services;
- collaboration between educational institutions and local government; and
- consideration of future student-housing requirements as enrolment grows.

Intended Outcome

An adequate supply of student housing that supports education, workforce development, and broader housing availability.

Status: Active / partially achieved

The Chamber publicly welcomed provincial funding for Penticton campus student housing and corresponded with the Ministers responsible for Housing and Post-Secondary Education regarding the project.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

Date, 2024

To: The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing
The Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills of B.C.
Cc: Dr. Roly Russell, MLA
Dan Aston, MLA
Penticton Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Council
Chief Greg Gabriel, Penticton Indian Band
Dr. Neil Fassina, President of Okanagan College

Re: Gratitude for Provincial Investment in Student Housing at Okanagan College Penticton Campus

Dear Honourable Ministers' Ravi Kahlon and Lisa Beare,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to extend our deepest gratitude for the British Columbia government's significant $23.5 million investment in Okanagan College's Penticton Campus. The announcement of the new 89-unit on-campus housing, a first for Penticton, is a momentous step forward for our community.

This investment not only addresses an ongoing need for affordable student housing but also supports the growth and development of our campus, community, and region. There are so many direct and indirect benefits that will result from this project, from attracting and retaining talented students for our workforce to the prospect of housing summer workers, particularly for our tourism and hospitality sectors, the potential that this student housing project will unlock is significant.

We appreciate the efforts and investment made by the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills in making this project a reality. The Chamber looks forward to witnessing the positive and lasting impact this will have on Penticton and surrounding areas.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

July 29, 2024
Our Ref. 135429

Jordan Knox
President

Michael Magnusson
Executive Director

Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
185 Lakeshore Drive W
Penticton, BC V2A 1B7

Email Address: mmagnusson@penticton.org

Dear Jordan Knox and Michael Magnusson:

Thank you for your letter of July 12, 2024, regarding funding for the Okanagan College's Penticton campus student housing project.

Our Government is committed to increasing affordable housing, including the expansion of on-campus student housing in partnership with public post-secondary institutions. I am pleased that this funding will support students attending the Penticton campus as well as contribute to community growth throughout Penticton and its surrounding areas.

With student housing in progress for Kelowna, Vernon and Salmon Arm, the additional housing in Penticton will ensure all students at Okanagan College have access to safe, affordable accommodation while they complete their studies. I am grateful for the hard work done by the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce in supporting students in our province.

My Ministry is glad to partner with you and Okanagan College for the benefit of people living in British Columbia.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Sincerely,

Honourable Lisa Beare
Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills

pc:	Honourable Ravi Kahlon Minister of Housing	HOUS.Minister@gov.bc.ca
	Roly Russell, MLA Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development	roly.russell.MLA@leg.bc.ca
	Dr. Neil Fassina, President Okanagan College	nfassina@okanagan.bc.ca

Temporary, Emergency, and Supportive Housing

Issue

Insufficient emergency, temporary, and supportive housing can contribute to unsafe encampments, public disorder, survival fires, business disruption, and negative outcomes for people experiencing homelessness.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports appropriately located and professionally operated temporary, emergency, and supportive housing that provides a safer alternative to encampments and connects people with services, housing, healthcare, and treatment.

The Chamber has publicly supported a 24/7 winter shelter, an extension of temporary shelter operations, investment in the Heart and Hearth program, a temporary-use permit for tiny homes, and an extension of the Dawson Avenue shelter permit.

Intended Outcome

A coordinated housing and service system that improves human outcomes while reducing the impacts of homelessness and encampments on businesses, residents, public spaces, and emergency services.

Status: Achieved and Monitoring

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

September 27, 2024

To: Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
Cc: Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Blake Laven, Director of Development
Julie Czeck, Director of Public Safety and Partnerships

Re: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR 2024/25 WINTER SHELTER

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to express our support for the proposed temporary winter shelter to be located at 402 Warren Avenue East. Unlike last year's model which required shelter guests to vacate the premises each morning at 9am, a 24/7 operation will provide new and critical benefits such as access to support services, a reduction in fires started in alcoves and dumpsters that could easily spread to structures, and a more practical and less disruptive setting that is away from residential neighbourhoods.

Providing a shelter that remains open to guests 24 hours a day will ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness will have consistent access to essential services, including minor health care, social support, and referrals to housing or treatment programs. These continuous services are crucial for connecting vulnerable individuals with the long-term care they need to improve their circumstances, while simultaneously reducing the burden placed on Penticton Regional Hospital for wound-care management and exposure.

In addition to the humanitarian benefits, this shelter also addresses a public safety concern. Without a safe place to go during freezing temperatures, individuals experiencing homelessness often resort to lighting fires in alcoves, dumpsters, and other sheltered areas in a desperate attempt to stay warm. This poses a significant risk of structure fires, which endangers lives, causes property damage, and strains our emergency services. By providing a 24/7 shelter with adequate heating and safety measures, we can reduce the likelihood of such incidents and help protect both our vulnerable citizens and local businesses from the dangers of fire-related hazards.

Furthermore, the proposed location in Penticton's industrial area provides a practical and less disruptive setting for the shelter, away from residential neighborhoods. The 24-hour safety and security plan outlined in the proposal will ensure the shelter is managed responsibly and that both shelter guests and the surrounding community feel secure.

We also commend the collaboration between the City of Penticton, BC Housing, Interior Health, and non-profit organizations in developing this comprehensive solution. As highlighted in last year's shelter review, the integration of services greatly enhances the ability to transition individuals from homelessness to stable housing. By providing consistent, round-the-clock service throughout the winter, this shelter can be a critical resource in addressing homelessness in Penticton while mitigating some of the pressures this issue places on our local businesses and community services.

We urge Penticton's City Council to approve the Temporary Use Permit for the proposed shelter at 402 Warren Avenue East. Ensuring that Penticton has a safe, operational shelter this winter is not only an act of compassion but also reduces the public safety risks in a way that benefits the entire community.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We look forward to continued collaboration in building a stronger, more inclusive and prosperous Penticton.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Jordan Knox, President
Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

March 17, 2025

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Re: SUPPORT FOR THE EXTENSION OF THE TEMPORARY WINTER SHELTER

Dear Mayor and Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce wants to express its strong support for the proposed extension of the temporary winter shelter at 402 Warren Avenue East until March 31, 2026. In its short operation, the shelter has demonstrated significant success in addressing the critical needs of Penticton's unhoused population while simultaneously mitigating public safety concerns. Maintaining its operation for another year will ensure continued access to vital support services and stability for individuals in need, while also benefiting the broader community.

The success of this shelter model, developed through collaboration between the City of Penticton, BC Housing, Interior Health, and other local non-profit organizations, has been evident in the outcomes seen to date. The shelter has provided essential services to more than 60 individuals, with 11 successfully transitioning into stable housing. Moreover, guests have gained access to critical healthcare services, mental health and substance use support, and pathways to long-term recovery and stability. These outcomes highlight the effectiveness of this model in providing real solutions to the homelessness and health of our city.

A year-round shelter will continue to offer these crucial benefits, reducing the strain on emergency services, healthcare providers, and local businesses. By providing 24/7 shelter and support, we can minimize the risks associated with street homelessness and potentially meet the Charter of Rights threshold needed to prevent encampments by providing adequate shelter spaces to the unhoused.

The Chamber commends the City of Penticton's leadership in pursuing this solution and urges Council to support the extension of the Temporary Use Permit for the shelter at 402 Warren Avenue East. Furthermore, we support the City's efforts to secure provincial funding to ensure the shelter remains sustainable and effective in addressing homelessness in our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working together toward meaningful and lasting solutions for our community.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Blake Laven, General Manager of Development Services
Julie Czeck, General Manager of Public Safety and Partnerships

February 12, 2026

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Re: SUPPORT FOR EXTENSION OF TEMPORARY USE PERMIT – 441 DAWSON AVENUE

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is writing to express its strong support for the extension of the Temporary Use Permit for 441 Dawson Avenue, allowing for the continued lease and operation of the Temporary Winter Shelter at this location.

The Temporary Winter Shelter has proven to be a critical and effective component of Penticton's response to homelessness. At any given time, it provides safe, warm accommodation for up to 40 individuals who would otherwise be unsheltered and exposed to the elements. In doing so, the shelter has significantly reduced the number of people sleeping in doorways, alcoves, parks, and commercial areas, contributing to improved public safety and easing pressure on emergency and enforcement services. Just as importantly, it offers a structured pathway from crisis toward stability and longer-term housing solutions.

The measurable outcomes achieved through this model demonstrate its value to our community. The shelter has welcomed dozens of individuals and supported many in transitioning to more stable living arrangements. Through coordinated partnerships with the City of Penticton, BC Housing, Interior Health, Penticton's social sector, and other community stakeholders, shelter residents have gained access to health care, mental health and substance use supports, and individualized services that promote long-term stability. These results clearly show that when a shelter is combined with the appropriate supports, meaningful progress is possible for both those individuals and the broader community.

From the business community's perspective, the continued operation of the Temporary Winter Shelter remains essential. By providing a consistent, managed, and supported alternative to street homelessness, the shelter helps reduce street disorder, property damage, and emergency response pressures that disproportionately impact local businesses. It also supports a safer and more welcoming environment for residents, employees, customers, and visitors alike.

The Chamber recognizes that homelessness is a complex issue without a single solution, however, the continued success of the Temporary Winter Shelter at 441 Dawson Avenue shows that pragmatic, compassionate, and coordinated approaches deliver tangible benefits for both vulnerable individuals and the broader community. Discontinuing or interrupting this operation would risk returning up to 40 individuals to street homelessness, increasing pressure on public spaces, businesses, and emergency services, and undermining the progress made toward community stability and vibrancy.

For these reasons, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce strongly encourages Council to approve the extension of the Temporary Use Permit for 441 Dawson Avenue and to continue supporting the lease agreement and operation of the Temporary Winter Shelter at this location.

Thank you for your time and continued commitment to building a safer, healthier, more vibrant City.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Julie Czeck, General Manager of Public Safety and Partnerships
Blake Laven, General Manager of Development Services

Encampment Response

Issue

Unmanaged encampments can create significant health, safety, sanitation, fire, property, and business concerns while failing to provide appropriate long-term support for the people living within them.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports a coordinated, humane, accountable, and time-sensitive response to encampments that combines:

- suitable shelter and housing alternatives;
- outreach and support services;
- enforcement of applicable laws and public-space rules;
- protection of neighbouring businesses and residents;
- sanitation and site management;
- clear government accountability; and
- a plan to restore affected public property.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- coordinated leadership among the City, Province, service agencies, and law enforcement;
- clear timelines and responsibilities;
- regular communication with affected businesses and residents;
- measurement of public-safety and housing outcomes;
- adequate shelter and service capacity;
- prevention of indefinite unmanaged encampments; and
- restoration and maintenance of impacted public spaces.

Intended Outcome

A compassionate response that connects people with appropriate services while maintaining safe, accessible, and economically viable public spaces.

Status: Active / monitoring

The Chamber publicly communicated with the City and Province regarding the Fairview encampment, including its management, Heart and Hearth investment, and government funding.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

May 27, 2025

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Councilors
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Re: SUPPORT FOR COORDINATED AND COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE TO THE FAIRVIEW ENCAMPMENT

Dear Mayor Bloomfield and Members of Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce wants to express its support for the City's ongoing efforts to work collaboratively with the Province of British Columbia, the snpink'tn Indian Band, and other partners to develop a lawful, coordinated, and compassionate plan to address the Fairview Road encampment.

We understand that this is a complex and sensitive matter with no simple solutions. However, we recognize and appreciate the thoughtful and strategic approach the City has taken in engaging provincial ministries, respecting Indigenous collaboration, and prioritizing public safety. The Chamber strongly agrees that dismantling the encampment without a clear plan to transition individuals into a form of safe and alternative shelter or housing space would not only be ineffective, but potentially disastrous for other areas around our community.

Compared to recent years, our members have reported a noticeable decline in city-wide property crime and disruptive street-level activity. While challenges remain, many believe this is due, in part, to the centralization of unhoused individuals at the Fairview site as well as the 40 residents currently accessing the City's temporary winter shelter. Disbanding the Fairview encampment without alternative options risks pushing individuals back into alleyways, doorways, parks, and other public spaces throughout the city, undoing progress made toward improving safety for both the unhoused and the broader business community.

We urge the City to remain steadfast in its position that any resolution to this issue must involve provincial coordination, transitional housing, and wraparound supports. Further, we ask all levels of government and their respective representatives to focus on working together for solutions that reflect the values of our community: compassion, safety, dignity, and collaboration.

The Chamber remains committed to supporting the City of Penticton and its partners in creating long-term, sustainable strategies that protect businesses, residents, and our most vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

June 30, 2025

The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Email: HMA.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: SUPPORT FOR HEART AND HEARTH PROGRAM INVESTMENTS IN PENTICTON

Dear Minister Kahlon,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce wants to express its strong support for the implementation of the *Heart and Hearth* program in Penticton. As a community that continues to face the complex and evolving challenges of homelessness, this program represents a critically needed step forward in providing lasting, compassionate, and effective solutions that benefit both unhoused individuals and the business environment in which we all operate.

Penticton's business community has been deeply impacted by the visible and human toll of homelessness. From public safety concerns and costly property damage to the emotional strain on staff and the detrimental effect on tourism, the issue has weighed heavily on local employers and workers. At the same time, we understand that effective change to this complex issue requires more than enforcement, it demands sustained investment in housing, health, and human services.

Programs like Heart and Hearth are precisely the kind of transformative, person-centered approach our community needs. The success of similar models, such as the temporary winter shelter at 402 Warren Avenue, demonstrates that when properly resourced and coordinated, shelter programs can deliver real, measurable outcomes. That site alone has served over 60 individuals, with many transitioning into housing and receiving critical access to mental health, addiction recovery, and primary healthcare services. Expanding and evolving this model through Heart and Hearth will not only build on these successes but create longer-term stability and safety for our entire city.

From a business standpoint, we firmly believe that supporting the unhoused and supporting economic development are intrinsically linked. Reducing homelessness decreases the strain on emergency services, reduces the potential of unsanctioned encampments such as the one located at Fairview Avenue and Channel Parkway, and improves the overall public realm. At the same time, a stable and supported population contributes to a healthier workforce, a more vibrant downtown core and commercial district, and a safer, more welcoming experience for residents and visitors alike.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

We also commend the coordinated efforts between the City of Penticton, Interior Health, BC Housing, local non-profits, and Indigenous partners to bring programs like this forward. This level of cooperation, matched with appropriate provincial investment, will ensure that individuals in crisis are not simply displaced but instead supported on a path toward recovery, stability, and dignity.

The introduction of Heart and Hearth in Penticton would mark a significant and meaningful step in this journey. We urge the Province to approve and fully fund its implementation here, and we remain committed as a Chamber to supporting ongoing, collaborative efforts that contribute to a safer, healthier, and more prosperous community for all.

Thank you for your leadership, your partnership, and your continued commitment to addressing homelessness with compassion, evidence, and resolve.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Office of the Premier, The Honourable David Eby
The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
The Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction
The Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Health
Mayor Bloomfield and Esteemed Councillors
y̓ilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel and Members of xʷiɬm for the snpink'tn Indian Band
Mr. Vincent Tong, CEO of B.C. Housing
Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Blake Laven, General Manager of Development Services
Julie Czeck, General Manager of Public Safety and Partnerships

P: 778-476-3111 185 Lakeshore Drive W, Penticton B.C. V2A 1B7 www.penticton.org

Tiny Homes and Transitional Housing

Issue

Small-scale transitional housing can provide an alternative to encampments and conventional emergency shelters when properly located, operated, and supported.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports appropriately managed tiny-home and transitional-housing projects where they:

- respond to a demonstrated housing need;
- include professional oversight;
- provide necessary wraparound supports;
- establish clear operating and conduct standards;
- minimize impacts on neighbouring properties and businesses;
- include measurable outcomes; and
- form part of a broader pathway toward permanent housing.

Intended Outcome

Safe and accountable transitional accommodation that reduces unsheltered homelessness and supports movement into permanent housing.

Status: Inactive

The Chamber publicly supported a temporary-use permit allowing tiny homes in 2025.

Penticton City Council did not approve a temporary use permit for the space on which the tiny homes would be placed, therefore, the province of B.C. redirected the Heart and Hearth funding that would have supported the tiny home project to other communities.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

October 31, 2025

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9
Email: corpadmin@penticton.ca

Re: SUPPORT FOR ISSUING A TEMPORARY USE PERMIT FOR 616 OKANAGAN AVENUE EAST

Dear Mayor and Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce wants to express its support for the proposed Temporary Use Permit (TUP) to allow up to 50 tiny homes with 24/7 on-site support at 616 Okanagan Avenue East (the Dartmouth Dog Park site). This project offers a timely, practical, and compassionate solution to those experiencing homelessness, while yielding meaningful benefits for the business community.

Homelessness has had a direct and negative impact on Penticton's business community. When individuals are forced to live unsheltered, many seek refuge in doorways, alcoves, or around commercial properties, leading to increased maintenance costs, property damage, and a heightened risk from fires. Businesses often experience reduced foot traffic as customers feel uneasy approaching storefronts where individuals loiter, and the Fairview encampment will undoubtedly impact tourism and perception of public safety given its visibility. Additionally, local governments and emergency services face higher response demands, diverting resources from other community needs. The resulting cycle, where economic activity declines, public spaces deteriorate, and service pressures rise, hurts all our businesses. Providing safe, supported housing solutions not only restores dignity to those experiencing homelessness but also revitalizes commercial areas, encourages investment, and strengthens community confidence.

The Chamber recognizes the success already seen with the shelter, commonly known as the Temporary Winter Shelter, located at 441 Dawson Avenue. With their 40 beds, the shelter has provided essential services to more than 118 unique individuals, with 20 successfully transitioning into stable housing. Shelter residents have gained access to critical healthcare services, mental health and substance use support, and pathways to long-term recovery and stability. These outcomes highlight the effectiveness of the collaboration between the City of Penticton, BC Housing, Interior Health, and local non-profit organizations, in providing the security and safety plan and the real solutions to the homelessness and health of our city.

Currently, Penticton's shelter and housing continuum is missing a transitional step between emergency shelters and long-term or market housing. The tiny-home project directly fills this gap, creating an essential "bridge" to reintegration. Residents can access stability, community, and individualized supports necessary to maintain employment, rebuild routines, and eventually secure permanent or market housing. Without this

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Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

transitional layer, too many individuals cycle repeatedly between shelters, the street, and emergency services, creating strain on municipal and business resources alike.

Based on what the Chamber has witnessed in Prince George and 'Moccasin Flats', also known as the Lower Patricia Boulevard Encampment, the Ministry of Transportation and Transit would not be successful in receiving an injunction to remove individuals currently residing in the 'Fairview' Encampment at the corner of Channel Parkway and Fairview Avenue due to an inadequate amount of shelter and housing spaces. In Prince George, the City failed to receive an injunction to close Moccasin Flats in 2021 and again in 2022 due to an insufficient number of shelter spaces available. It wasn't until August 2025 when the province, the B.C. Housing Management Commission, and the City of Prince George made significant investments to create new housing and shelter for unhoused people in Prince George that an injunction was granted by the courts.

As a city that relies heavily on tourism, meetings, conventions, and events, the ongoing visibility of the Fairview encampment poses a growing risk to one of Penticton's most vital economic streams. Approving the addition of 50 supportive housing units would not only create the necessary shelter capacity to meet legal requirements should an injunction be sought to permanently close the encampment, but it would also provide a compassionate, structured pathway for those currently living at Fairview to transition into safe, stable, and supported housing.

While the Chamber understands that there are a number of residents asking for a delay in approving the temporary use permit, time is extremely limited and therefore critical that Penticton's City Council secure HEART and HEARTH funding form the Province at the November 4th City Council meeting. Delays or perceived uncertainty could jeopardize our eligibility, as other communities across British Columbia are also actively lobbying and competing for these limited resources with the government of British Columbia.

Thank you for considering our position and for your continued commitment to building a safer, healthier, and more inclusive Penticton for businesses and residents alike.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Blake Laven, General Manager of Development Services
Julie Czeck, General Manager of Public Safety and Partnerships

Compassionate Redevelopment

Issue

Redevelopment may increase housing supply and support economic growth, but can also displace existing tenants where appropriate mitigation is not provided.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports redevelopment that contributes to the community's housing, tourism, and economic-development objectives while including reasonable measures to assist tenants who may be displaced.

Compassionate redevelopment should seek to balance:

- private investment;
- property rights;
- housing and accommodation supply;
- tenant impacts;
- project viability;
- timely approvals; and
- predictable requirements.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- clear and predictable tenant-assistance requirements;
- early communication with affected tenants;
- reasonable relocation support;
- consideration of vulnerable tenants;
- avoidance of requirements that make beneficial redevelopment unviable;
- efficient approvals; and
- cooperation among developers, government, and housing organizations.

Intended Outcome

Redevelopment that supports investment and community growth while treating displaced tenants fairly and reducing avoidable hardship.

Status: Successful / monitoring

The Chamber publicly supported a "Compassionate Redevelopment" bylaw in 2026 and previously supported hotel development while raising concerns about displaced, vulnerable tenants that may become unhoused.

Media Coverage:

https://globalnews.ca/video/10695487/low-income-motel-residents-face-uncertain-future-in-penticton/

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

July 15, 2024

To: Mayor Bloomfield and Penticton City Council
Cc: Anthony Haddad, CAO
Blake Laven, Director of Development Services

Re: Support for Rezoning of El Rancho Motel to Tourist Commercial

Good Day Mayor Bloomfield and Esteemed Councillors,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is writing to express its support for the proposed rezoning of the current El Rancho Motel back to tourist commercial. Given its strategic location near the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre, changes to short-term rental regulations that are redirecting demand back to commercial accommodators, and the upcoming B.C. Summer Games taking place in 2028, this rezoning is both timely and would provide needed accommodations during large-scale events.

While a hotel in this location is welcomed, it is important to acknowledge the current situation of approximately 100 long-term tenants residing in the El Rancho Motel who are paying below-market rent. At this time, there is no comparable housing for these residents to move into which puts them at risk of experiencing homelessness. It is with this in mind that we strongly recommend that any eviction process be phased and carried out with ample notice to the tenants so that they will have as much lead time as possible to find alternative housing.

While it is reassuring to hear that the current owner of El Rancho sounds willing to take this approach, the continued lack of comparable, below-market rental housing remains. This is why the Chamber will be simultaneously advocating the Minster of Housing and B.C. Housing to take any and all necessary steps, including rental supplements and expediting construction on phase one of the Skaha Assembly Redevelopment project to provide these tenants with comparable options when development on the El Rancho begins.

Given the future benefits the El Rancho Motel redevelopment would bring to the City, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce supports this rezoning application.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

February 13, 2026

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Re: SUPPORT FOR 'COMPASSIONATE REDEVELOPMENT' BYLAW

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is writing to express its support for the proposed "compassionate redevelopment" bylaw, which would require developers to submit a formal tenant relocation plan prior to receiving approval to demolish rental houses or motels containing more than four units.

The Chamber has previously voiced support for redevelopment projects that strengthen Penticton's long-term economic vitality. On July 15, 2024, our letter supporting the rezoning of the El Rancho Motel to Tourist Commercial acknowledged both the economic importance of expanding hotel inventory and the vulnerability of approximately 100 long-term tenants, many of whom were, and assumably still, paying below-market rents. At that time, we strongly recommended that any eviction process be phased and carried out with ample notice to provide tenants with the greatest possible opportunity to secure alternative housing.

Simultaneously, the Chamber wrote to the CEO of B.C. Housing and the Minister of Housing, noting that changes to short-term rental regulations had shifted accommodation demand back toward hotels. Older motels providing below-market rent were beginning to evaluate redevelopment opportunities. In that letter, we advocated for rental supplements and the expedited delivery of new housing supply through the Skaha Assembly project to mitigate displacement and reduce the risk of homelessness should the El Rancho redevelopment proceed.

While that particular project remains idle, the potential for redevelopment at any of Penticton's motels currently providing below-market rental units still exists. To avoid exacerbating our homelessness challenges, it is essential that future development be undertaken responsibly, with careful consideration given to tenant displacement to ensure that vulnerable residents are not left without viable housing options.

The proposed compassionate redevelopment bylaw represents a clear, balanced, and proactive approach. Just as developers are required to submit traffic impact studies, environmental assessments, and servicing plans to mitigate physical impacts, requiring a tenant relocation plan will ensure that the social impacts of redevelopment are addressed with the same level of foresight, planning, and accountability.

From a business and economic perspective, certainty and clarity in process are essential to fostering investment. Requiring a formal tenant relocation plan at the outset provides predictability for developers, transparency for tenants, and strong leadership from Council. It sends a clear signal that Penticton welcomes growth, tourism, and investment, while also recognizing the very real human impacts that accompany redevelopment in a tight and expensive rental market.

We appreciate Council's leadership on this important matter and support the adoption of this bylaw.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Blake Laven, General Manager of Development Services
Julie Czeck, General Manager of Public Safety and Partnerships
Steven Collyer, Housing and Policy Initiatives Manager

Short-Term Rental Policy and Displacement

Issue

Short-term rental regulation can affect housing supply, tourism accommodation, property owners, workers, and tenants.

Changes may create benefits but can also produce unintended housing displacement or reduce legitimate accommodation inventory.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports balanced short-term rental regulation that responds to housing concerns while recognizing tourism, property rights, enforcement capacity, and the risk of unintended displacement.

The Chamber publicly expressed mixed views on provincial short-term rental restrictions and later raised concerns regarding people potentially displaced by regulatory changes.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- evidence-based regulation;
- clear definitions and rules;
- appropriate exemptions;
- reasonable implementation periods;
- effective enforcement;
- mitigation planning for displaced occupants;
- consultation with affected businesses and property owners; and
- periodic review of housing and tourism outcomes.

Intended Outcome

A regulatory framework that supports housing objectives without creating disproportionate harm to legitimate businesses, tenants, visitors, or property owners.

Status: Active / monitoring

Media Coverage

https://globalnews.ca/news/10037456/new-short-term-rental-rules-could-impact-penticton-tourism/

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

July 15, 2024

To: The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing
Cc: MLA Dan Ashton
Vincent Tong, CEO of B.C. Housing
Penticton Mayor and Council

Re: Request to Address Housing Displacement in Penticton Due to Short-Term Rental Regulation Changes

Good Day Minister Kahlon,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to bring to your attention a situation where recent changes to short-term rental regulations are creating a risk of displacing individuals. Specifically, a local motel that currently provides long-term affordable rentals to approximately 100 individuals is applying to re-zone their property to tourist commercial with the aim of building a hotel. The Chamber supports this type of development and the benefits it will bring to our local economy, however, we are very concerned about the lack of affordable housing alternatives for anyone who will be displaced by this, or similar types of projects.

The Chamber understands that the regulatory changes to short-term rentals were intended to see those secondary residences in communities with over 10,000 residents either be re-listed as long-term rentals, or put up for sale. While both scenarios may prove to be true, another that is emerging is where commercial property owners are evaluating and taking steps to capitalize on the demand that is being redirected towards commercial accommodations. Given Penticton's strong tourism industry where 10% of our workforce is employed by the tourism sector, this type of re-zoning application comes as no surprise.

The City of Penticton applied for and was subsequently denied an exemption from the new short-term rental regulations, based on the criteria that the city has a rental vacancy rate of less than 3%. Additionally, the city was denied recognition as a resort community. Given that it was the provincial government that changed the regulations around short-term rentals, putting approximately 100 people at high risk of displacement and even homelessness, we believe the responsibility to create and provide alternative housing solutions for these tenants should also lie with the province, specifically through its Crown corporation, BC Housing.

The Chamber has taken the opportunity to send a similar letter to B.C. Housing informing them of this developing situation with requests that they provide measures such as rental supplements until such time as more affordable housing becomes available. Further to that, in anticipation of the B.C. Summer Games scheduled to take place here in 2028, we have also asked B.C. House to expedite phase one of their Skaha Assembly Redevelopment project to be completed in 2027, a year earlier than currently scheduled.

It is our hope that the Ministry of Housing will provide the resources needed for B.C. Housing to act upon our requests in order to support development in our community while also protecting those who are vulnerable to displacement resulting from recent regulatory changes to short-term rentals.

We thank you for taking the time to review our request, and look forward to your response. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us directly.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

July 15, 2024

To: Vincent Tong, CEO of B.C. Housing
Lauren Antifeau, Provincial Director, Redevelopment | Development & Asset Strategies
Cc: The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Housing
MLA Dan Ashton
Penticton Mayor and Council

Re: Addressing Housing Needs in Penticton: Request for Action on Short-Term Rental Regulation Impact

Good Day Mr. Tong et al,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to discuss the lack of supply of below-market rental units and how recent changes to short-term rental regulations are necessitating action from B.C. Housing to mitigate those at risk of displacement.

We understand that changes to short-term rental regulations were intended to convert those rentals into long-term rental supply, however, with almost half of Penticton's short-term housing supply now ineligible due to the principal residency requirement, demand has significantly increased for hotel accommodations. As a result, the City of Penticton has received an application to re-zone the El Rancho Motel, located across from the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre, from urban residential to tourist commercial.

The City of Penticton attracts tens of thousands of visitors each year for conferences, leisure, recreation, and to attend large-scale events like the Elvis Festival, Granfondo, and in 2028, the B.C. Summer Games. Understanding just how strong and necessary tourism is for the City, Penticton's Mayor and Council took the appropriate step of requesting that we be recognized as resort municipality which would have provided an exemption to the short-term rental changes, however, the Ministry of Housing quickly denied the application. As a result, demand from tourism is naturally shifting back to commercial accommodations, and with that shift is an interest by motel owners to develop more hotel units.

It is therefore not surprising that the owner of the El Rancho Motel, and other privately-owned motels, are evaluating opportunities to meet this demand by redeveloping into hotels. From an economic standpoint, the Chamber welcomes this type of investment and amenity to our City, however, the irony is not lost that changes to our short-term rental supply, which were intended to increase long-term rental units, are now placing long-term motel tenants currently paying below-market rates at high risk of displacement, and even homelessness. In the case of the El Rancho Motel, that property currently provides affordable rentals to approximately 100 long-term tenants.

While we know that B.C. Housing is not responsible for legislative changes, as the province's Crown Corporation mandated to provide subsidized housing to British Columbians, B.C. Housing is the most appropriate organization to mitigate the consequences directly attributed to short-term rentals. It is our understanding that B.C. Housing has rental supplement programs active in Penticton and strongly advocate for those programs to be made available to any and all of the tenants residing at the El Rancho when hotel construction begins. We are also aware that phase one of the Skaha Assembly Redevelopment project is not scheduled to begin accepting tenants until some time in 2028, but with the B.C. Summer Games being hosted that same year expected to draw thousands of family members and spectators to the Games, we urge B.C. Housing to expedite phase one's completion for 2027.

We sincerely appreciate your attention to this matter and look forward to your favourable response. Should you require any further information to wish to discuss this matter in greater detail, please do not hesitate to contact us directly. In the meantime, we thank you for your ongoing commitment to improving housing supply, particularly for those in vulnerable financial positions, in Penticton and across British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Development Approvals and Land-Use Certainty

Issue

Slow, uncertain, or inconsistent development processes can increase costs, delay housing and business investment, and reduce confidence.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports timely, transparent, predictable, and evidence-based land-use and development-approval processes.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- clear application requirements;
- published approval timelines;
- early identification of technical issues;
- coordinated departmental review;
- appropriate use of digital permitting;
- regular reporting on approval performance;
- meaningful but timely public consultation;
- infrastructure planning that supports growth; and
- decisions that consider business and economic impacts.

Intended Outcome

A development environment that supports responsible growth, housing supply, investment, and public confidence.

Status: Active / ongoing

Pillar 2 – Community Safety & Security

The Chamber supports a coordinated approach to community safety that protects people, businesses, property, public spaces, and the economic vitality of the community.

Safety concerns can affect:

- customer traffic;
- employee recruitment and retention;
- insurance costs;
- security expenses;
- investment decisions;
- downtown vitality;
- tourism;
- public confidence; and
- the viability of individual businesses.

The Chamber supports prevention, treatment, housing, enforcement, environmental design, victim support, and appropriate consequences as complementary components of an effective community-safety system.

Property Crime and Repeat Offending

Issue

Repeated vandalism, theft, break-ins, property damage, and chronic offending impose direct and indirect costs on businesses.

These costs may include:

- repairs;
- insurance deductibles;
- lost inventory;
- business interruption;
- private security;
- employee safety concerns;
- reduced customer visits; and
- diminished confidence in commercial areas.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports stronger prevention, enforcement, prosecution, supervision, and intervention measures directed at chronic property offending.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- coordinated policing, prosecution, corrections, health, housing, and social-service responses;
- identification and active management of chronic offenders;
- timely information-sharing within legal limits;
- meaningful consequences for repeat offending;
- access to treatment and rehabilitation;
- support for affected businesses;
- transparent performance reporting; and
- evaluation of whether interventions reduce reoffending and victimization.

Intended Outcome

A measurable reduction in repeat property crime and the financial and operational burden placed on businesses.

Status: Achieved / monitoring

The Chamber publicly welcomed the establishment of a Chronic Property Offending Hub in Penticton in June 2026.

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: June 23, 2026
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

PENTICTON CHAMBER APPLAUDS PROVINCE FOR ESTABLISHING NEW CHRONIC PROPERTY OFFENDING INTERVENTION HUB IN PENTICTON

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is welcoming the Province of British Columbia's decision to establish a new regional Chronic Property Offending Intervention Initiative (C-POII) hub in Penticton, calling it a significant investment in community safety, business confidence, and long-term solutions to repeat property crime.

Announced by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General yesterday (June 22), the Province is investing $16 million over two years to expand the Chronic Property Offending Intervention Initiative across British Columbia. The expansion includes 12 new regional hubs, one of which will be located in Penticton, providing enhanced supervision and coordinated support for individuals responsible for a disproportionate amount of property crime and public disorder.

"Local businesses continue to face the impacts of theft, vandalism, break-ins, and street disorder," said Jordan Knox, President of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce. "The creation of a regional C-POII hub in Penticton demonstrates that the Province recognizes the challenges facing communities like ours and is prepared to invest in practical, evidence-informed solutions that improve safety while addressing the root causes of repeat offending."

The C-POII model brings together police, probation officers, Crown prosecutors, correctional staff, mental health professionals, and community service providers to coordinate interventions for chronic offenders. The initiative combines accountability measures with access to housing, mental health, and substance-use supports designed to reduce reoffending and improve community outcomes.

The Chamber notes that property crime and street disorder place a significant financial and emotional burden on local businesses. Beyond direct losses from theft and vandalism, business owners often face increased security costs, staff safety concerns, insurance pressures, and challenges attracting customers to commercial areas affected by public disorder.

"The success of our local economy depends on people feeling safe when they visit our downtown, shop in our plazas, and invest in our community," remarked Michael Magnusson, the Chamber's Executive Director. "This initiative recognizes that public safety and social supports are not competing priorities, they are complementary tools that work together to create stronger, healthier communities."

The provincial expansion builds on successful pilot projects launched in Kelowna, Nanaimo, and Nelson in late 2025. According to the Province, police in Kelowna have credited the program with helping stabilize property crime trends and contributing to reductions in break-and-enter offences through a more coordinated and targeted response.

The Chamber also welcomes the Province's commitment to ensuring smaller and regional communities benefit from the initiative. The Penticton hub will help strengthen coordination among local law enforcement, justice partners, health services, and community organizations while improving access to resources across the South Okanagan.

"Addressing repeat offending requires collaboration across multiple systems," added Magnusson. "We commend the provincial government, our local government, the RCMP, community organizations, and all partners involved in bringing this hub to Penticton. This investment will help create a safer environment for businesses, residents, visitors, as well as those individuals seeking to break the cycle of offending."

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce looks forward to working with community partners and government stakeholders as the initiative is implemented and continues to advocate for policies that support safe, vibrant, and economically resilient communities.

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For more information, contact:

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
mmagnusson@penticton.org

Jordan Knox, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
Jordan.Knox@rona.ca

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is a dynamic, trusted and respected business authority representing hundreds of local businesses and organizations that drive economic and social growth and improvement on behalf of, and in support of our members and the community.

Business Vandalism and Prevention Support

Issue

Small businesses may be disproportionately affected by vandalism because repair, insurance, and security costs cannot always be absorbed easily.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports accessible government assistance for businesses experiencing vandalism and for preventative security improvements.

Recommendations

Programs should:

- be simple to access;
- include timely reimbursement;
- cover both damage and prevention;
- recognize repeated victimization;
- support cameras, lighting, locks, barriers, and other reasonable improvements;
- be communicated clearly to businesses; and
- be evaluated for effectiveness.

Intended Outcome

Reduced financial harm to businesses and improved prevention of future incidents.

Status: Partially achieved / monitoring

The Chamber publicly identified the securing of a small-business rebate for vandalism and prevention as an advocacy outcome in 2023.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Penticton, BC

For Immediate Release: November 2, 2023
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Securing The Small Business Rebate to pay for Criminal damage and/or Preventative Measures

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is excited to share the news of the newly launched Securing Small Business Rebate Program, an initiative by B.C.'s Ministry of Jobs, Economic Development, and Innovation. This program aims to support small businesses in Penticton and across the province by providing funds for eligible commercial property crime and vandalism repairs or implementing preventative measures.

With the increasing costs associated with property crime and vandalism affecting both rural and urban communities across British Columbia, this $10.5 million program comes as a welcome relief for small businesses facing these challenges.

Program Timeline:

- The application portal will be live from November 22, 2023, to January 31, 2025.
- Rebate applications are retroactive to January 1, 2023, through December 31, 2024, and will be processed on a first-come-first-served basis.
- Successful rebate applications will be screened, reviewed, approved, and paid within 35 business days, with minimal follow-up.
- Rebates will be issued via Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) from December 2023 to February 2025.

Types of Rebates:

1. Reparative Rebate: This offers immediate relief to offset eligible reparative costs incurred due to damage to eligible commercial property caused by vandalism on or after January 1, 2023. It's available as a one-time rebate of up to $2,000 per calendar year.

2. Preventative Rebate: This provides funding for eligible proactive/preventative measures to mitigate damage to eligible commercial property due to vandalism. It's available as a one-time rebate of up to $1,000.

Eligibility Criteria:

To be eligible for either rebate, businesses should be in good standing with the Province of British Columbia and should not have received an alternative, local rebate or grant to cover the same expense.

We encourage all our valued members to take advantage of this opportunity to secure support for your business. This program is an excellent way to mitigate the financial impact of property crime and vandalism.

Our partner organization, the BC Chamber of Commerce, will administer the rebate program, ensuring that businesses from every sector and region in the province are aware of the rebate and have the chance to apply.

For more information, visit: https://bcchamber.org/securing-small-business-rebate

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

Issue

The design and maintenance of public spaces can influence safety, visibility, accessibility, and business activity.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports the use of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles in commercial areas and public spaces.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- improved lighting;
- clear sightlines;
- appropriate landscaping;
- visible access and exit points;
- active use of public spaces;
- maintenance and rapid repair;
- coordinated security design;
- consultation with nearby businesses; and
- measurement of safety and economic outcomes.

Intended Outcome

Public and commercial spaces that feel safer, attract legitimate activity, and reduce opportunities for crime and disorder.

Status: Active / location-specific

The Chamber publicly supported implementation of the first phase of CPTED improvements at Nanaimo Square in 2025, however, it was not passed by City Council.

Media Coverage:

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/541231/Penticton-council-to-discuss-major-re-design-of-Nanaimo-Square-to-discourage-problematic-behaviours

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/541948/Pentictons-Nanaimo-square-to-stay-as-is-for-now-following-city-council-vote-rejecting-tree-fountain-removal

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

Jordan Knox, President
Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

March 28, 2025

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Re: SUPPORT FOR IMPLEMENTING PHASE 1 OF NANAIMO SQUARE'S CPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

Dear Mayor Bloomfield and Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce wants to express its support to implement Phase 1 of the CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) improvements to Nanaimo Square this coming spring, followed by a period of monitoring the effectiveness of phase 1's enhancements.

The Chamber has been actively engaged in efforts to address ongoing safety and security concerns in the downtown core. Alongside the Downtown Penticton Business Improvement Association (DPBIA), we have worked collaboratively with City staff to identify solutions that would improve sightlines and discourage undesirable activities such as open drug use that have been negatively impacting local businesses, particularly those in close proximity to Nanaimo Square.

During our Business Walks initiative late last year, we interviewed 20 downtown business owners, and the findings were very concerning:

- 75% of respondents identified crime and undesirable activity as a challenge affecting their business.
- 55% reported that their property had been vandalized, damaged, or broken into over the past year.

These numbers underscore the urgent need for strategic action, and we believe that the proposed CPTED measures are a positive and necessary step toward enhancing safety, revitalizing Nanaimo Square, and fostering a more welcoming environment for residents, visitors, and businesses alike.

The Chamber encourages Council to move forward with the proposed Phase 1 improvements, including the removal of the spruce tree and concrete surround, adjustments to seating and planters, and the removal of the fountain, which will allow for the potential to activate the area with commercial activity, and discourage undesirable and illegal activity.

We appreciate the City's commitment to addressing these challenges in partnership with the business community, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate on solutions that benefit all stakeholders.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Blake Laven, General Manager of Development Services
Julie Czeck, General Manager of Public Safety and Partnerships

Public Drug Use

Issue

Unrestricted public drug use can create health, safety, economic, and public-space concerns for businesses, employees, residents, visitors, and people who use drugs.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports restrictions on illicit drug use in public and commercial spaces while also supporting access to treatment, healthcare, outreach, shelter, and recovery services.

Intended Outcome

Safe and accessible public spaces alongside effective health, treatment, and recovery pathways.

Status: Successful

The Chamber publicly supported the recriminalization of public drug use in 2024.

Media Coverage:

https://globalnews.ca/news/9643332/pushback-interior-health-suggestion-delay-bylaws/

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/422636/Penticton-business-group-speaks-out-against-provincial-request-to-let-drug-decriminalization-play-out-without-restriction-in-coming-months#422636

https://www.pentictonwesternnews.com/news/penticton-chamber-concerned-after-interior-health-asks-for-delay-to-open-substance-use-ban-3640362

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: April 21st, 2023
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

CHAMBER BELIEVES PENTICTON HAS ALREADY WAITED-AND-SEEN LONG ENOUGH; RESPONSE TO INTERIOR HEALTH'S REQUEST FOR OBSERVATION PERIOD

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce respectfully objects to Interior Health's request to postpone passing a Penticton bylaw that would make it illegal to consume narcotics in public spaces such as in our parks and sidewalks. British Columbia is in the first of a three-year pilot project decriminalizing small amounts of street drugs like heroin, methamphetamine, fentanyl, crack and powder cocaine, but the provincial government left the door open for cities to pass bylaws around drug use itself.

"While we appreciate the reasons behind Interior Health's request to collect data on public narcotic consumption, decriminalization by itself is not the answer," states Nicole Clark, Chamber President. "Everyone refers to the Portugal model and how decriminalization is necessary, but what always seems to be left out is everything else that makes that model so effective."

In Portugal, drug users have access to a high-level of wraparound services, none of which exist in Penticton. Furthermore, Portugal's legislation still allows fines and even jail terms if drug users fail to follow the dissuasion commission's recommendations.

"In Penticton, we were denied funding from Interior Health for a Car-40 program and do not have outreach workers that you'd typically see in an urban centre guiding those suffering from addiction into treatment. Now they want us to hold-off putting restrictions on where people can and cannot ingest narcotics?" ask the Chamber's Executive Director Michael Magnusson. "The contents of the proposed bylaw put forward to Mayor and Council is not punitive, but rather helps ensure that public areas, especially those visited by families, seniors, tourists, and areas around storefronts are kept as safe and accessible as possible while those with drug dependencies are still able to utilize designated consumption sites."

Bylaw Enforcement Officers would also be designated as Peace Officers, which would help allow them to resolve less serious matters in the community while providing an added level of protection as assaulting a peace officer is more severe than regular assault.

While the Chamber sympathizes with everyone who has become trapped in addiction and is saddened by the circumstances and stories of those who have become addicted and why, those under the influence of narcotics can display unpredictable and sometimes alarming behaviour. The Chamber believes that Interior Health should instead expedite their investment in treatment and complex care solutions rather than asking communities like Penticton to wait, which has already led to organized groups taking matters into their own hands.

"One could argue that Penticton, along with the rest of province, has waited long enough already, and because things continue to deteriorate for both those suffering from drug-dependency as well as communities at large, local governments must take action to protect their residents and economies until such time as the province and its various health authorities implement meaningful measures to deal with this epidemic."

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For more information, contact:

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
mmagnusson@penticton.org

Nicole Clark, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
president@penticton.org

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: April 30, 2024
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

PENTICTON CHAMBER SUPPORTS RECRIMINALIZATION

As a leading advocate for local businesses and after observing a record-setting year of overdose deaths in 2023 in the same year that British Columbia implemented the decriminalization of public drug use, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the recriminalization of public drug use as announced by the provincial government.

"We are encouraged to see that Police will once again have the tools to ask people to move along if they're consuming narcotics in public spaces," announces Jordan Knox, President of the Chamber of Commerce. "And should they choose not to cooperate with that request, Police will once again be able to seize those drugs and take appropriate measures to keep our sidewalks, parks, commercial properties, and beaches free from illicit drug use and discarded paraphernalia."

The intent of decriminalization was to decrease the number of overdose deaths and reduce the stigma associated with addiction, however, the reality was much different than what advocates and some politicians predicted. Residents and business owners and managers alike grew more-and-more concerned with the threats posed by open drug use to the general public, including abandoned or broken paraphernalia, unpredictable and sometimes alarming behaviour, as well as second-hand exposure to illicit substances.

With Premier Eby now asking the Federal Government to amend the pilot project that would remove the ability to consume illicit substances in public places, the Chamber has heard opposing concerns raised by harm reduction groups who state that those living on the street and suffering from addiction will automatically be considered a criminal, but the Chamber does not believe that to be the case.

"We know that arrests stemming from simple possession were almost non-existent even before this pilot project," states Michael Magnusson, the Chamber's Executive Director. "We also know that the RCMP are not evaluated or compensated on the number of arrests they make, so it is highly doubtful that an individual who is in possession of a small amount of drugs for personal use or is caught actively consuming them outdoors would be arrested if they are cooperative with Police." In fact, through regular dialogue with local RCMP leaders and not-for-profit housing providers, the Chamber knows that our RCMP Members have worked hard on establishing rapport with many of those experiencing homelessness and/or addiction in Penticton, and their goal has always been to steer these individuals towards treatment and support, not incarceration and punishment.

With the public consumption aspect of decriminalization all but rescinded, the Penticton Chamber is to renew its call for the provincial government to adopt and adequately fund each of the four pillars approach, which includes a focus not only on harm reduction, but also prevention, treatment, and enforcement. This model has seen significant success in places like Sydney Australia whose population is larger than B.C's, as well as many other cities throughout the world.

"Embracing and investing in all four pillars is the only way our communities are going to get through this toxic drug crisis," concludes Magnusson, "because making anyone wait months to get into treatment, or sending someone who just completed a treatment program back into low-barrier (wet) housing because no other spaces are available, is not and will never be a recipe for success."

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For more information, contact:

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
mmagnusson@penticton.org

Jordan Knox
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
jordan.knox@rona.ca

Safe Public Spaces and Enforcement Authority

Issue

Local governments may require effective legal and enforcement tools to address unsafe activity in public spaces.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports clear, enforceable, legally sound public-space bylaws and appropriate authority for trained enforcement personnel.

Intended Outcome

Public spaces that are safe, accessible, and managed consistently.

Status: Active / monitoring

The Chamber publicly supported recognition of bylaw officers as peace officers and responded to the development of a Safe Public Spaces Bylaw in 2023.

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: March 24, 2023
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

CHAMBER SUPPORTS RECOGNITION OF BYLAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS AS PEACE OFFICERS

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce and its members strongly supports officially recognizing the City's Bylaw Enforcement and Community Safety Officers as Peace Officers.

"The City's Bylaw Enforcement and Community Safety Team has been crucial in making our City safer and cleaner," states Chamber President Nicole Clark. "And given the thousands of calls they are now responding to each year and the types of issues they are being asked to resolve, it only makes sense that we provide them with the title and legal authority to perform their duties."

The Chamber also commends the City for outlining the expectations around conduct in public spaces and particularly in front of storefronts which has so far been missing in our municipal bylaws.

"Everyone has the right to access public spaces, and businesses also have the right to ensure that access to their property is not compromised with unwanted activity or obstructions that could create hesitation in- or prevent customers from entering," commented Michael Magnusson, the Chamber's Executive Director. "I am glad that our community safety bylaws are being updated to a level that's commonplace in urban centres."

Like the City, the Chamber is also advocating for more resources to help those in need, particularly those struggling with addiction, and commends Mayor and Council for taking the first step in bringing the Car 40 program to Penticton, despite Interior Health choosing Kelowna and Kamloops. Discussions also need to take place within the City and with the Province that focus on plans to expand complex care facilities so that first stage housing isn't the only stage of housing for those wanting to break the cycle they've become trapped in.

The Chamber knows that the Safe Public Places Bylaw, as well as the Peace Officer designation, are only the first steps in achieving Council's strategic priorities in creating a safer and more accessible community while they continue to work with the Provincial Government and Interior Health for additional resources.

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AUTHORIZING THE USE OF COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICERS TO COMPLIMENT THE WORK OF POLICE AS PART OF A TIERED RESPONSE

Issue

Escalating street disorder – including loitering, public drug use, vandalism, property damage, mischief, fires, break-ins, and declining perceptions of safety – is imposing significant and growing costs on businesses across British Columbia. Understaffed police detachments and limitations in bylaw enforcement authority have left local governments with insufficient tools to address low- to moderate-risk public safety concerns efficiently. A clear, principle-based amendment to the British Columbia Police Act to enable a tiered response model — applicable across both municipal police and RCMP-policed communities — would provide a more cost-effective and responsive approach while maintaining public safety standards.

Background

Across British Columbia, businesses are absorbing increasing direct and indirect costs associated with street disorder. These costs include:

- Increased private security contracts.
- Installation and maintenance of surveillance systems.
- Repair of vandalism and graffiti.
- Replacement of stolen merchandise.
- Insurance premium increases.
- Staff time spent managing disorder-related incidents.
- Lost customer traffic due to safety perceptions.

A recent survey by the Business Improvement Association of British Columbia found that rising vandalism, theft, street disorder, and related public-safety issues are pushing many B.C. small businesses toward the brink of closure.[1] Nearly two-thirds of respondents reported increased street disorder over the past year, including drug- and mental-health-related activity, theft, broken windows, violence, and aggression — conditions that have increased fear and anxiety among staff and customers and driven up operating costs. About one in five business owners said they may not remain financially viable beyond the next year if conditions do not improve, while over half reported reduced foot traffic and 61 per cent cited higher expenses due to crime and vandalism, illustrating how public-safety issues are directly undermining business confidence, profitability, and long-term sustainability.

In BC, Bylaw Enforcement Officers (BEOs) are recognized as peace officers under Section 2 of the Criminal Code of Canada when acting within the course of their duties.[2] This status has been upheld in court decisions.[3] However, the scope of their authority remains limited relative to the public safety challenges facing municipalities.

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[1] Vandalism, theft pushing many B.C. small businesses to the brink, BIV https://www.biv.com/small-business/vandalism-theft-pushing-many-bc-small-businesses-to-the-brink-11142160#:~:text=Nearly%20three%2Dquarters%20(74%20per,a%20better%20health%20outcome%20system.%E2%80%9D

[2] Criminal Code of Canada, Section 2 – Peace Officer Definition. https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/c-46/section-2.html

[3] R. v. Jones (1975). Yukon Territory Magistrates Court. https://www.younganderson.ca/images/seminar_blogs/Appointment_and_Powers_of_Bylaw_Enforcement_Officers-DH.pdf

As a result, local governments increasingly rely on an inconsistent mix of police, BEOs, business improvement associations, and social service outreach. Many incidents fall below the criminal threshold requiring police intervention yet exceed the current enforcement authority of BEOs. Implementation considerations will differ between municipalities served by local police forces and those policed by the RCMP; however, the need for a flexible, scalable tiered response model is consistent across both contexts.

Rising policing costs and structural strain

The cost of policing in Canada has risen significantly over the past two decades, outpacing inflation, even as overall crime rates have declined.[4] Municipal governments face mounting pressure to expand police budgets, yet small and mid-sized communities often lack the fiscal capacity to fund significant increases in sworn officers. Without alternative response models, continued reliance on traditional policing alone will place additional financial pressure on municipalities, with downstream impacts on local businesses through taxation and operating costs.

Structurally, when police resources are diverted to low-risk regulatory or public nuisance calls, response times for serious incidents are impacted. This creates further risk for businesses already facing increased exposure to theft, vandalism, and fire-related damage.

Provincial models demonstrate economic efficiency

Alberta has implemented a Community Peace Officer model that allows trained personnel to enforce municipal bylaws and select provincial legislation without requiring full police authority.[5] Saskatchewan's Community Safety Officer (CSO) program similarly provides targeted enforcement support, freeing police resources for high-priority criminal matters.[6]

These tiered models:

- Reduce policing overtime costs.
- Provide faster response to quality-of-life and regulatory issues.
- Improve visible enforcement presence in commercial areas.
- Lower overall public safety delivery costs.

The Licence Inspectors' and Bylaw Officers' Association of British Columbia (LIBOA) has formally recommended amendments to the *BC Police Act* to enable a comparable model.[7]

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[4] Leuprecht, C. (2014). The Blue Line or the Bottom Line of Police Services in Canada? Macdonald-Laurier Institute. https://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/MLI_CostofPolicing_Final.pdf
[5] Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (2020). Community Peace Officer/Police Costing Model. https://www.abmunis.ca/advocacy-resources/resolutions-library/community-peace-officerpolice-costing-model
[6] Government of Saskatchewan (2014). Community Safety Officer Program. https://www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2014/december/01/community-safety-officer-program
[7] Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (2020). Community Peace Officer/Police Costing Model. https://www.abmunis.ca/advocacy-resources/resolutions-library/community-peace-officerpolice-costing-model

Economic impact of inaction

Without reform, businesses will continue absorbing:

- Escalating private security costs.
- Insurance premium increases tied to property crime.
- Reduced commercial tenancy attractiveness.
- Lower retail and hospitality revenues due to safety perceptions.
- Increased fire risk from street encampments and disorder-related incidents.

These costs are particularly burdensome for small and medium-sized enterprises that lack the financial buffer to absorb sustained operating increases.

Public safety is not solely a social issue, it is a direct and growing threat to the ability of businesses to operate, invest, expand, and remain financially sustainable.

The Chamber Recommends

That the Provincial Government:

1. Amend the British Columbia Police Act to authorize a principle-based, tiered public safety model allowing local and Indigenous governments to designate Community Safety Officers (or equivalent roles) with appropriate authority such as Special Constable status to address low- to moderate-risk public safety issues, in coordination with existing police services.
2. Establish provincial standards for the training, oversight, accountability, and scope of authority for Community Safety Officers, ensuring the framework is adaptable to both municipal police and RCMP-policed communities, recognizing differences in governance and service delivery models.
3. Provide local and Indigenous governments with the autonomy to determine if Community Safety Officers with special constable status are appropriate for their communities.
4. Enable local and Indigenous governments the ability to deploy Community Safety Officers with Special Constable status in commercial districts to address street disorder, regulatory compliance, and nuisance-related incidents that negatively impact business operations.

Submitted by the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Supported by the Prince George Chamber of Commerce

Pillar 3 – Affordability & Competitiveness

A competitive business environment is essential to a strong local economy, sustainable employment, community prosperity, and Penticton's ability to attract and retain investment.

The Chamber supports policies that strengthen the competitiveness of businesses by reducing unnecessary costs, removing barriers to investment, improving regulatory efficiency, encouraging innovation, and creating an environment where businesses of all sizes can invest, grow, and create employment.

Businesses operate within an increasingly complex and competitive environment. Rising costs, workforce challenges, taxation, regulatory requirements, access to capital, and broader economic uncertainty can affect whether a business expands, hires additional employees, makes new investments, or remains viable.

The Chamber recognizes that affordability and business competitiveness are influenced by:

- taxation, fees, and other government-imposed costs;
- regulatory complexity and approval timelines;
- commercial property and occupancy costs;
- labour availability, skills, and employment costs;
- energy, utilities, insurance, and other operating expenses;
- access to capital and financing;
- availability and cost of housing for employees;
- transportation and supply-chain costs;
- interprovincial and international trade barriers;
- access to technology and opportunities for innovation;
- government procurement and opportunities for local businesses; and
- overall economic confidence and investment conditions.

Business Taxation

Issue

Municipal, provincial, and federal taxes directly affect business investment, expansion, competitiveness, and affordability.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports fair, predictable, and competitive taxation that encourages business investment while ensuring governments have sustainable revenues to deliver essential public services.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- competitive commercial property taxation;
- transparent taxation policies;
- equitable treatment of small businesses;
- periodic review of business tax competitiveness;
- avoidance of disproportionate tax increases; and
- consultation with the business community before significant tax changes.

Intended Outcome

A competitive tax environment that encourages investment and long-term business growth.

Status: Active / ongoing

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

November 9, 2023

To: His Worship, Mayor Julius Bloomfield, and Esteemed City Councillors
Cc: Anthony Haddad, Chief Administrative Officer
Angela Campbell, Director of Finance and Administration

Re: Proposed 2024 City of Penticton Budget

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would first like to acknowledge and thank the City Staff, especially Director of Finance and Administration Angela Campbell, who took the time to review the proposed 2024 budget with members of our board and staff, and then answer all of our questions in a very knowledgeable and sincere manner.

As we all know, prior Mayor and Council passed a budget back in 2022 that would have seen Penticton property owners' taxes increase by 15.7% in order to fund additional public safety resources, however, they deferred a large portion of that increase to instead be paid evenly over the next three years, amounting to a 3.3% hike each year until the end of 2025. Between the deferral as well as monies still needed to strengthen public safety, 2023 saw one of the highest municipal tax increases in recent history of 9.5%, resulting in an averaged additional $696 paid out by commercial property owners and $180 by residents.

2024's budget is also affected by 2022's tax deferment, however, the question for Mayor and Council this year is whether to lump the final two deferrals into one for an 8.7% property tax increase, or allow the phased-in repayment schedule to continue which works out to approximately a 5.8% increase for both residential and commercial owners.

	Average Annual Increase		
	Lump Deferrals into 2024	**Phased-in Deferral**	**Difference**
Residential	$175	$117	$58
Commercial	$678	$456	$222

You'll note that difference between both scenarios isn't really that high, however, the separate but parallel increase in 2024's utility rates are significant. The average residential property will see an average $268 annual increase, while the average commercial property will pay an additional $1,360.

It is in looking at the totality of 2024's increases that the Chamber requests that Mayor and Council continue with a phased-in deferral approach in order to provide some financial relief for the increased utility rates. While the Chamber truly appreciates the goal of returning the City's financial position back to one of sustainability which would see 2 to 3 months' worth of operating expenses in reserves, we believe both the financial and symbolic impact of keeping any municipal tax increase at-or-below 6% signals appropriate fiscal restraint while we all continue to navigate through challenging and unpredictable times. The Chamber would also like to acknowledge the work staff did to keep year-over-year operational increases low.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share our position with you.

Sincerely,

Nicole Clark

Nicole Clark
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

November 26, 2024

To: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister and Privy Council
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Cc: The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance;
The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade and Economic Development;
The Honourable Gudie Hutchings, Minister of Rural Economic Development;
The Honourable Rechie Valdez, Minister of Small Business;
Richard Cannings, Member of Parliament for South Okanagan - West Kootenay

Re: Impact of the GST Holiday on Penticton Businesses

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, we are writing to share feedback gathered from our local business community regarding the Federal Government's temporary GST holiday set to begin on December 14, 2024. While the intent to provide financial relief to Canadians is appreciated, our findings reveal that this initiative is unlikely to achieve its desired outcomes for most businesses in Penticton.

Key insights from our survey include:

1. Limited Impact:
    - 80% of respondents do not expect the GST holiday to affect sales, with another 10% listed as unsure.
2. Administrative Burden:
    - Businesses cited costly and time-consuming adjustments to point-of-sale systems and accounting processes as a major challenge. These changes must be reversed after the holiday ends, adding further expense.
3. Timing Concerns:
    - Many businesses believe the December 14 start date is too late to influence holiday shopping behavior. Customers typically complete purchases earlier, particularly for items requiring shipping.
4. Broader Concerns:
    - Respondents frequently critiqued the measure as short-sighted and insufficient to address the financial pressures both businesses and consumers face. Suggestions included eliminating GST on essential items, providing direct rebates, or implementing policies with longer-term impacts and with more advanced notice.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

Our Chamber recognizes the importance of providing financial relief to Canadians during this challenging time. However, feedback from our business community indicates that the GST holiday, as currently structured, falls short of delivering meaningful benefits and imposes unnecessary costs on businesses already struggling with inflation and other pressures.

We hope this input will help inform future decisions on fiscal policy and support programs. Our Chamber is committed to fostering dialogue between government and local businesses, and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate further on policies that ensure sustainable economic growth.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

P: 778-476-3111 185 Lakeshore Drive W, Penticton B.C. V2A 1B7 www.penticton.org

Business Costs and Inflation

Issue

Escalating operating costs—including wages, insurance, utilities, financing, fuel, supplies, and interest rates—reduce business competitiveness and limit investment.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports policies that improve affordability for businesses while maintaining sustainable public finances and economic stability.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- measures that improve productivity;
- targeted relief during extraordinary economic events;
- policies that reduce inflationary pressures;
- stable taxation;
- efficient infrastructure investment; and
- programs that improve business productivity and innovation.

Intended Outcome

A more competitive business environment with sustainable operating costs.

Status: Active

Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: April 6, 2023
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

6.9% HIKE IN MINIMUM WAGE WILL HAVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is concerned that a 6.9% increase in B.C.'s minimum wage will create unintended consequences.

"For a city like Penticton, the first thing we'll see are those residents on fixed incomes, primarily our seniors, lose even more buying power as employers raise prices to compensate for higher labour costs," says Chamber President Nicole Clark. "And the sectors where you'll most likely see this occur include hospitality, food and beverage, and retail, including grocery stores."

Another result that can occur from minimum wage increases are cuts in hours to workers.

"With only 2 months' notice from the provincial government before the increase takes effect, businesses will be reviewing their budgets to see where they can shed expenses," explains Michael Magnusson, Executive Director. "The most controllable expense in business is labour, so whether you're a small business owner or a manager in a large corporation, if you don't want- or can't pass this added expense onto your customers, you instead reduce employee hours wherever you can, which essentially cancels out the increase."

Businesses also continue to be hit hard in the post-pandemic era. Just over a year ago, the province legislated five employer-paid sick days regardless of whether an employee works full or part time, as well as added another statutory holiday. Penticton Mayor and Council just voted to raise the business tax multiplier to 2.22 which will cost the average Penticton commercial property owner another $617 in annual taxes, and small businesses are starting to drown from interest payments on loans they had to take in order to keep their business open. Add to that the money now spent on security systems and private security officers along with any repair costs and insurance premiums resulting from vandalism and break-ins as community safety continues to erode, it will eventually become too much.

"The Chamber is a bit like the canary in the coal mine at the moment," remarks Clark. "We, along with other Chambers and business owners are trying to sound the alarm that if all of these government forces from municipal up to the provincial and federal levels continue to independently load more expenses onto the backs of the businesses, the collective result will be increases in commercial insolvencies and reductions in access to goods and services, community vibrancy, and the competitive forces that are needed keep prices as low and standards as high as possible."

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P: 778-476-3111 185 Lakeshore Drive W, Penticton B.C. V2A 1B7 www.penticton.org

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

January 2nd, 2024

To: The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance;
The Honourable Randy Boissonnault, Minister of Employment;
The Honourable Soraya Martinez Ferrada, Minister of Tourism;
The Honourable Rechie Valdez, Minister of Small Business; and
The Honourable Harjit S. Sajjan, Minister responsible for the Pacific Economic Development Agency of Canada

Re: REQUEST TO DELAY CEBA and RRRF LOAN REPAYMENT DEADLINE

Good day Honourable Ministers,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to respectfully request that the Federal Government extend the Canadian Emergency Benefit Account (CEBA) and Rural Relief & Recovery Fund (RRRF) loan repayment and applicable loan forgiveness deadline to January 18th, 2025. CEBA, RRRF, and other federal emergency loan programs were instrumental in providing close to 900,000 businesses with the financial lifeline needed to keep their doors open in the face of significant economic challenges caused by COVID-19. While it has been estimated that many businesses have already repaid their loans, there are still several industries such as restaurants, tourism operators, and other small-to-medium sized businesses, that are still significantly impacted from a less-than-ideal recovery period; one that has been complicated by inflation and increased costs for goods, decreased revenues, higher interest rates, and other factors beyond a business owner's control. It is the Chamber's position that another 12-months will allow these industries, which provide so much of a community's vibrancy, the time to improve their cash flow and subsequent profitability in order to have a fighting chance of surviving.

Small-and-medium sized businesses are a major part of Canada's economy and will be more adversely affected by the impending repayment deadline compared to their larger counterparts. Ironically, the businesses who need financial help the most will be the ones to lose out on the forgivable portion of up to $20,000 if they cannot secure alternate lending arrangements before January 18th, 2024. Some may make the decision to end their business or claim bankruptcy if this deadline is not extended, where commercial bankruptcies have already shown a 41% year over year increase compared to quarter 3, 2022. Regardless of whether a business decides to close of its own volition or file for bankruptcy, nobody wins as taxes will no longer be generated from that business or its employees, and the community loses a valuable and often beloved venue or service.

While we can appreciate the reluctance to provide yet another 12-month delay, this past year has not been without significant challenges. Increased costs, diminished consumer spending, and higher interest rates have all combined for lower profit margins and some to operate at a loss. In Penticton, climate-related events caused even further hardship, with vineyards ravaged by an unseasonable winter cold snap, followed by a summer in which record wildfires resulted in the cancelation of Ironman Canada that was worth over $15 million in local economic activity.

We ask you to show your support for small and medium-sized businesses, and those in the food and beverage, tourism, and hospitality industries, by providing one more year of grace which may very well be the difference between recovery and insolvency.

Respectfully Yours,

Nicole Clark
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

February 5, 2025

To: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister and Privy Council
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Re: URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO POTENTIAL U.S. TARIFFS

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce and the business community we represent, we are writing to express our concerns regarding the White House's continued threats of tariffs on Canadian goods and the immediate actions we believe Canada must take to mitigate the economic impact. The potential implementation of these tariffs threatens key sectors of our economy, including agriculture, manufacturing, and trade-dependent industries. To safeguard Canadian businesses and workers, we urge the federal government to take the following steps:

1. **Dismantle Interprovincial Trade Barriers**

   The time has come for the federal and provincial governments to eliminate interprovincial trade barriers. Studies suggest that removing these restrictions could increase Canada's GDP by 4–7%, equating to $50–$200 billion annually. At a time when international trade relationships are under strain, it is imperative that Canada maximizes economic opportunities and mandates free trade throughout its own borders.

2. **Expand and Diversify Canada's Trading Partners**

   To reduce economic dependence on the United States, Canada must work aggressively to diversify its trade relationships. Strengthening agreements with the European Union, Asia-Pacific nations, and emerging markets will protect Canadian businesses from economic volatility caused by shifts in U.S. trade policy.

3. **Implement a Clear "Made in Canada" Identification System**

   We recommend the introduction of legislation requiring Canadian-made products to display an official seal or emblem for easy identification. This system should include strict qualification criteria, ensuring that a significant percentage of a product must be made in Canada or assembled by Canadian workers. A standardized label would allow consumers—both domestically and internationally—to more easily support Canadian products, reinforcing national economic strength.

4. **Strengthen Port and Rail Security**

   In addition to securing our land borders, we strongly encourage the inclusion of ports and rail in these efforts. The disbandment of the Ports Canada Police in 1997 weakened our ability to intercept narcotics and other illegal goods at entry points. Furthermore, Canada's Border Services Agency has no infrastructure in place to search trains for drugs, people, and other goods crossing illegally into and out of the country by rail. Reinstating dedicated port policing and increasing CBSA resources for railcar inspections would not only address U.S. concerns but also enhance national security and combat the organized crime activities fueling Canada's illicit drug crisis.

5. **Permanently Repeal the Capital Gains Tax Increase**

   While we appreciate that the federal government has announced a one-year delay, the planned increase to capital gains needs to be permanently repealed due to the compounded economic uncertainty created by ongoing threats of U.S. tariffs. Raising the capital gains inclusion rate discourages investment, entrepreneurship, and business expansion at a time when Canadian companies must remain competitive in the face of potential trade restrictions. Higher capital gains taxes reduce incentives for business owners to reinvest profits, scale operations, and create jobs, ultimately weakening Canada's economic resilience. To foster economic stability, attract investment, and support long-term growth, the federal government should permanently repeal its proposed capital gains increase and instead focus on policies that enhance business confidence and global competitiveness.

6. **Ensure Transparent and Fiscally Responsible Financial Relief Measures**

   Should financial relief packages be required to offset the effects of U.S. tariffs, it is critical that they are designed and distributed with full transparency and fiscal responsibility. Relief efforts must be targeted, effective, and accountable to avoid unnecessary waste and inefficiency that could once again accelerate inflation and add to Canadians challenges in rising costs.

7. **Reconvene Parliament to Address Urgent Economic Challenges**

   Given the severity of the economic threat posed by potential U.S. tariffs, we echo the Canadian Chamber of Commerce's call to reconvene Parliament. Swift legislative action is needed to implement policies that protect Canadian businesses, stabilize the economy, and position Canada for long-term growth amid uncertain global trade conditions.

We appreciate the work that has already been done in addressing the threat of U.S. tariffs and the resulting 30-day reprieve, however, to help insulate Canadians from the impact of tariffs whether imposed by the United States or other nations, we must take steps to strengthen Canada's economy, security, and expand international trade opportunities.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Finance
The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada
The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Export Promotion, International Trade, and Economic Development
The Honourable David J. McGuinty, Minister of Public Safety
The Honourable Pierre Poilievre, Leader of the Official Opposition
The Honourable Jagmeet Singh, Leader of the New Democratic Party
The Honourable Yves-François Blanchet, Leader of the Bloc Québécois
The Honourable Elizabeth May, Leader of the Green Party of Canada
The Honourable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia
The Honourable Brenda Bailey, British Columbia's Minister of Finance
The Honourable Diana Gibson, British Columbia's Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
The Honourable Garry Begg, British Columbia's Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
The Honourable Rick Glumac, British Columbia's Minister of State for Trade
Richard Cannings, Member of Parliament South Okanagan - West Kootenay
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the Legislative Assembly Penticton-Summerland
Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton

Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

September 12, 2025

Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Sent via email: council@penticton.ca

Re: CHAMBER'S POSITION ON PROPOSED INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

Dear Mayor and Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce supports the proposed transition of the City's infrastructure levy from a flat annual contribution to a percentage of property taxes. Moving to a percentage-based model is a prudent step that ensures annual contributions keep pace with inflation and community growth, thereby protecting the City's ability to maintain and renew essential infrastructure.

With that said, we believe the responsibility for determining the annual target percentage must rest with each seated Council during its respective budget deliberations. This provides the flexibility to balance infrastructure needs with other fiscal priorities and community pressures that arise in the future while respecting the accountability of each Council to the taxpayers they serve.

For these reasons, we encourage Council to move forward with converting the levy to a percentage of taxation, while leaving the decision of incremental percentage increases to future Councils as part of the regular budget process. This will provide a balance for long-term infrastructure sustainability, ensure that taxation decisions are fiscally prudent to the economic climate, and allow the community's elected representatives of the day to remain accountable to their constituents.

The Board and Staff would like to express their thanks to City Staff for taking the time to discuss this proposal and answer questions in person, and we thank you for taking the time to review our position on this important matter.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Labour Force Development

Issue

Persistent labour shortages continue to limit business growth throughout the South Okanagan.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports policies that strengthen workforce participation, skills development, immigration pathways, and employer access to qualified employees.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- expanded workforce training;
- apprenticeship opportunities;
- improved labour mobility;
- recognition of foreign credentials;
- targeted immigration programs;
- youth employment initiatives;
- stronger partnerships with educational institutions; and
- workforce housing initiatives.

Intended Outcome

A resilient workforce that meets the needs of local employers.

Status: Active

Interprovincial Trade

Issue

Interprovincial trade barriers increase costs, reduce productivity, limit consumer choice, and restrict the ability of Canadian businesses to compete and grow. Despite the existence of the Canadian Free Trade Agreement, differences in provincial legislation, regulations, licensing requirements, procurement policies, transportation rules, and product standards continue to impede the free movement of goods, services, investment, and labour across Canada.

For businesses in British Columbia and the South Okanagan, these barriers create unnecessary administrative costs, reduce market opportunities, discourage investment, and limit economic growth. They are particularly challenging for small and medium-sized businesses, which often lack the resources required to navigate multiple regulatory regimes.

The Chamber believes that reducing internal trade barriers will strengthen Canada's economy, improve business competitiveness, increase productivity, and create new opportunities for businesses throughout British Columbia.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports the elimination of unnecessary interprovincial trade barriers and the continued development of a modern, competitive, and integrated Canadian internal market.

The Chamber encourages all levels of government to work collaboratively to harmonize regulations, recognize equivalent provincial standards, improve labour mobility, and remove unnecessary restrictions that impede commerce between provinces and territories.

The Chamber further supports policies that enable British Columbia businesses to compete fairly in markets across Canada while preserving appropriate public health, safety, environmental, and consumer protections.

Recommendations:

The Chamber supports:

- the elimination of unnecessary regulatory barriers that restrict the free movement of goods, services, labour, and investment within Canada;
- greater harmonization of provincial regulations, standards, licensing requirements, and certification processes where appropriate;
- expanded mutual recognition agreements between provinces and territories for professional credentials, skilled trades, and occupational licensing;
- reducing administrative duplication and compliance costs for businesses operating in multiple provinces;
- improved interprovincial transportation and logistics systems that facilitate the efficient movement of goods throughout Canada;
- procurement policies that provide fair and open access for businesses to compete for public-sector opportunities across provincial boundaries;
- modernization of the Canadian Free Trade Agreement to address emerging economic sectors and remove remaining barriers to commerce;
- continued collaboration between federal, provincial, territorial, Indigenous, and industry partners to strengthen Canada's internal market;
- policies that improve market access for British Columbia products, including agricultural and value-added products, while maintaining appropriate quality standards; and

- regular consultation with the business community to identify and remove barriers that limit economic growth and competitiveness.

Intended Outcome

A more integrated Canadian economy in which businesses can compete, invest, hire, and expand across provincial boundaries with fewer unnecessary regulatory barriers, resulting in increased productivity, stronger supply chains, enhanced business competitiveness, greater consumer choice, and long-term economic prosperity for British Columbia and Canada.

Status: Partially Achieved / Monitoring

Jordan Knox, President
Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
185 Lakeshore Drive W, Penticton B.C. V2A 1B7

May 20th, 2025

To: The Honourable Danielle Smith
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 2B6

Sent via email: premier@gov.ab.ca et al

Re: Concerns Regarding New Alberta Wine Taxation and Interprovincial Trade Commitments

Dear Premier Smith,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce and our members, including many within the South Okanagan's wine industry, we wish to express our concern regarding Alberta's recently implemented a "value-added fee" on all wine sold through Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC) wholesale channels, which came into effect on April 1, 2025.

This measure has resulted in an estimated increase of $1.50 to $4.00 per bottle for consumers and appears to disproportionately impact small and mid-sized producers, including B.C. wineries who rely on access to Alberta's market.

At a time when Alberta has publicly committed to removing interprovincial trade barriers and advancing a freer, more collaborative Canadian marketplace, as stated on your own government's website, we find this policy change to be in direct contradiction to those goals. Rather than fostering open trade, it adds cost, complexity, and competitiveness challenges for out-of-province producers.

B.C. wineries are not just businesses, they are core contributors to our regional economy, agricultural sustainability, and tourism sector. Many of these wineries already face significant climate and production challenges due to unseasonable weather events and rely on interprovincial markets like Alberta to survive and grow.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

We respectfully urge your government to re-evaluate this new tax considering its broader impact on interprovincial commerce and its message to partners in other provinces. If Alberta truly wishes to lead the way in reducing trade barriers, we believe this must be reflected not only in policy statements but also in the actions that follow.

We welcome the opportunity for continued dialogue and cooperation between our provinces to ensure that mutual trade remains fair, supportive, and aligned with shared economic goals.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Dale Nally, Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction
The Honourable Matt Jones, Minister of Jobs, Economy and Trade
The Honourable Nate Horner, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board
Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC)
The Honourable Garry Begg, B.C. Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Helena Konanz, Member of Parliament for Similkameen, South Okanagan, West Kootenay
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly for Summerland-Penticton

Pillar 4 – Transportation & Infrastructure

Reliable transportation and modern, resilient infrastructure are essential to the economic prosperity, safety, and long-term competitiveness of Penticton and the South Okanagan.

The Chamber supports strategic investments that improve the movement of people, goods, services, and emergency responders while strengthening regional connectivity and resiliency. As a regional economic and service centre, Penticton depends on reliable connections to neighbouring communities, major transportation corridors, markets, airports, and the broader provincial economy.

The Chamber recognizes that transportation and infrastructure affect:

- workforce and customer mobility;
- movement of goods and supply-chain reliability;
- tourism and visitor accessibility;
- emergency response and evacuation capacity;
- business attraction, expansion, and investment;
- agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and other key industries;
- regional and air transportation;
- public transit and active transportation;
- energy availability and future capacity;
- water, wastewater, and municipal infrastructure;
- telecommunications and digital connectivity; and
- economic resiliency during emergencies and major disruptions.

Public Transportation and Regional Mobility

Issue

Accessible, reliable, and affordable public transportation is essential to the economic vitality and social well-being of Penticton and the South Okanagan. Effective public transit improves access to employment, education, healthcare, recreation, and commercial services while supporting workforce participation, tourism, environmental sustainability, and regional connectivity.

The Chamber recognizes that both local public transit and intercity transportation services play an important role in supporting businesses, residents, students, seniors, visitors, and workers throughout the region.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports investments that improve local and regional public transportation, expand affordable mobility options, and strengthen transportation connections between the South Okanagan and the rest of British Columbia.

The Chamber supports public transportation initiatives that improve accessibility, reduce transportation barriers, encourage sustainable travel, strengthen the regional economy, and contribute to the long-term competitiveness of Penticton and the South Okanagan.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- continued investment in reliable and accessible local public transit;
- affordable transit programs that improve access to employment, education, and community services;
- initiatives that encourage youth ridership and establish lifelong public transportation habits;
- expansion of regional and intercity bus services connecting Penticton with neighbouring communities and major centres throughout British Columbia;
- transportation solutions that improve workforce mobility and support labour force participation;
- enhanced transportation options that strengthen tourism and visitor access;
- collaboration between local governments, BC Transit, private transportation providers, Indigenous communities, and provincial agencies to improve regional connectivity;
- investment in accessible transportation for seniors and persons with disabilities; and
- transportation planning that supports environmental sustainability, reduces congestion, and contributes to regional economic development.

Intended Outcome

A safe, reliable, accessible, and integrated public transportation system that supports residents, businesses, visitors, and workers by improving mobility, strengthening regional connectivity, encouraging sustainable transportation, and enhancing the economic competitiveness of Penticton and the South Okanagan.

Status: Active

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

March 18, 2024

To: Mayor and Council, City of Penticton
Anthony Haddad, City Manager
Julie Czeck, Director of Safety and Partnerships

Re: PENTICTON CHAMBER COMMENDS CITY OF PENTICTON FOR FIRST IN B.C. TO OFFER FREE TRANSIT TO THOSE 24 YEARS OF AGE AND UNDER

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to applaud your initiative on piloting a project that provides free public transit to those aged 24-and-under. This vision is not just a commendable social policy, but also a forward-thinking economic strategy. By ensuring that young people have affordable and accessible transportation options, Penticton is investing in its future workforce and cultivating a more vibrant and inclusive community.

Free transit for youth will foster sustainable mobility habits from an early age, reducing traffic congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, and the city's carbon footprint. By promoting public transportation as a viable and attractive option, Penticton is taking strides towards a more environmentally friendly and resilient future.

We applaud the City for its leadership in prioritizing the needs of its younger residents and for recognizing the impact that accessible transit can have on their lives. This initiative sets a precedent for other communities across British Columbia, and is a pre-emptive step in reversing the demographic forecast that is prompting the review of school closures within the city.

Once again, we would like to thank the City of Penticton on creating this fantastic pilot project, and look forward to learning about its success.

Sincerely,

Nicole Clark

Nicole Clark
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

June 10, 2026

To: John Cowan
Sent via email: johnpcowan@shaw.ca

Re: Support for Expanding EBus Service to Penticton and the South Okanagan-Similkameen

Dear Mr. Cowan,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce we are pleased to provide this letter of support for the expansion of EBus service to Penticton and the South Okanagan-Similkameen region.

Reliable intercity transportation is a critical component of a thriving regional economy. Since the loss of long-distance bus service provided by Greyhound back in 2018, residents, businesses, students, seniors, visitors, and workers have faced limited options for affordable and accessible travel between the South Okanagan and major centres throughout British Columbia. Community advocates like yourself have highlighted the significant demand that exists for a direct connection between Penticton, Summerland, Keremeos, Princeton, the Lower Mainland, and other destinations served by EBus. Recent efforts have generated substantial public support and prompted our local government to express support for establishing this service in the region and has directed staff to begin discussions related to this opportunity.

The Chamber believes expanded EBus service would provide several important benefits, including:

- Strengthening Workforce Mobility;
- Supporting Tourism and Hospitality;
- Improving Accessibility and Inclusion;
- Enhancing Economic Connectivity; and
- Advancing Regional Sustainability Goals.

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce strongly supports the introduction of EBus service to Penticton and the South Okanagan-Similkameen and encourages EBus and relevant stakeholders to continue evaluating opportunities to establish service in our region.

We would welcome the opportunity to participate in future discussions regarding transportation connectivity and regional economic development.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Secondary Transportation Route

Issue

Penticton remains the largest population centre in British Columbia served by a single primary highway.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports development of a reliable, all-season secondary transportation corridor connecting Penticton with the Central Okanagan.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- long-term corridor planning;
- provincial and federal infrastructure funding;
- environmental assessment;
- emergency route planning; and
- collaboration between affected local governments.

Intended Outcome

Improved transportation resiliency, public safety, supply-chain reliability, and economic competitiveness.

Status: Active

Media Coverage

https://globalnews.ca/video/11316098/renewed-calls-for-permanent-alternate-route-between-kelowna-and-penticton/

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/564345/Mayor-renews-call-for-alternate-route-between-Penticton-and-Kelowna-following-wildfire-highway-closure

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

January 30, 2025

To: The Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Transportation and Transit
Cc: The Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
MLA Amelia Boultbee
Penticton Mayor and Council

Re: URGENT NEED FOR SECONDARY ROUTE BETWEEN PENTICTON AND KELOWNA

Dear Minister Farnworth,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to express our deep concerns regarding the lack of a viable secondary transportation route between Penticton and Kelowna and to urge immediate provincial action to address this critical infrastructure gap.

The recent closure of the William R. Bennett Bridge once again underscored the vulnerability of Highway 97 as the sole north-south connector between our communities. With the 201 Forest Service Road in an unsafe and impassable condition, travelers were left without a practical alternative, resulting in costly delays, missed medical and surgical appointments, disrupted business operations, and significantly strained transportation networks. Some individuals were forced to undertake arduous and extended detours via Highway 33, while others attempted to navigate the unmaintained 201 route, placing themselves at great personal risk and necessitating emergency rescue efforts by Penticton Search and Rescue and Okanagan Offroad Rescue and Recovery.

This is not an isolated incident. Over the past decade, Highway 97 has been repeatedly closed due to landslides, wildfires, rockslides, and accidents. Meanwhile, provincial investments in health care, post-secondary education, and transportation infrastructure have increasingly centralized critical services in Kelowna, making access to that city more essential than ever for residents, businesses, and emergency services across the South Okanagan. The lack of an alternative route is no longer a matter of convenience - it is a fundamental failure of regional transportation planning that threatens the economic stability and safety of our communities.

The Chamber has heard from countless business owners who are deeply concerned about the economic consequences of these recurring disruptions. Reliable transportation is essential for the movement of goods, employees, and customers. Without a secondary route, closures to Highway 97 create cascading financial impacts for businesses already contending with economic uncertainty. The unpredictability of travel between Penticton and Kelowna hinders regional commerce, deters investment, and places unnecessary strain on local businesses and their employees.

The City of Penticton has long advocated for improvements to the 201, securing widespread support from the Southern Interior Local Government Association and presenting this issue directly to the Ministry at the Union of British Columbia Municipalities meetings. Yet, despite these efforts, no substantive improvements have been made. The Chamber strongly supports the City's call for immediate action to upgrade and maintain the 201 as a viable, year-round emergency alternative. In addition, we urge the Province to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study on potential long-term solutions, including infrastructure improvements to Highway 97 and the exploration of new secondary route options.

Minister Farnworth, we recognize that transportation infrastructure requires significant investment and planning, but it is clear with this latest incident that we can no longer afford to wait. The economic prosperity and safety of our region depend on a reliable and resilient transportation network. We ask for your leadership in prioritizing this urgent issue and working with local governments, business stakeholders, and transportation experts to develop and implement a sustainable solution.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter further and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

P: 778-476-3111 185 Lakeshore Drive W, Penticton B.C. V2A 1B7 www.penticton.org

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

July 31, 2025

To: The Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Transportation and Transit
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Email: TT.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED TO DEVELOP SECONDARY ROUTE BETWEEN PENTICTON AND KELOWNA

Dear Minister Farnworth,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to renew our deep concerns regarding the lack of a viable secondary transportation route between Penticton and Kelowna and to urge immediate provincial action to address this critical infrastructure gap.

The current Drought Hill wildfire in Peachland that forced the closure of Highway 97, severing a vital connection between Kelowna and the South Okanagan, once again highlights the fragility of our transportation infrastructure. This incident follows a troubling pattern of closures caused by wildfires, landslides, accidents, and bomb threats along this single, heavily trafficked corridor. Every such closure places residents, businesses, medical patients, and emergency responders at extreme risk.

Last winter's closure of the William R. Bennett Bridge due to an individual who parked his van across multiple lanes followed by potentially explosive contents inside the van left travelers stranded without viable alternatives. Many were forced onto unsafe, unmaintained backroads or into lengthy detours through Osoyoos and over to Rock Creek to connect with Highway 33, adding hours onto a trip. Tragically, some individuals required emergency rescue assistance after attempting to navigate these dangerous alternatives.

Looking at the past decade, Highway 97 has been repeatedly closed due to landslides, wildfires, rockslides, and accidents. Meanwhile, provincial investments in health care, post-secondary education, and transportation infrastructure have increasingly centralized critical services in Kelowna, making access to that city more essential than ever for residents, businesses, and emergency services across the South Okanagan. Our local business community also continues to report significant operational and financial hardship due to these repeated transportation disruptions. The inability to reliably move goods, employees, or customers across the region has real economic consequences, deterring investment, threatening job stability, and undermining commercial confidence.

Minister Farnworth, the absence of a viable alternative route represents a critical failure in regional transportation planning, one that continues to jeopardize both the economic stability and public safety of communities across the South Okanagan. Your leadership is urgently needed to address this longstanding vulnerability. We respectfully urge your Ministry to collaborate closely with local governments, transportation experts, and stakeholders in business, emergency response, and health care to develop a permanent solution that ensures safe and reliable regional mobility in all circumstances.

We would welcome the opportunity to speak with you or your staff further and urge immediate action before the next closure places more lives and livelihoods at avoidable risk.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
The Honourable Kelly Greene, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
John Rustad, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly for Summerland-Penticton
ẏilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn Indian Band
His Worship Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton, and Penticton City Council

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

November 4, 2025

To: The Honourable Ravi Parmar, Minister of Forests
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
Email: FOR.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: INTERIM REQUEST: TO MAINTAIN AN ALTERNATE EMERGENCY ROUTE BETWEEN PENTICTON AND KELOWNA

Dear Minister Parmar,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to renew our call for a proactive solution to the long-standing transportation vulnerability facing Penticton and the South Okanagan communities when Highway 97 becomes impassable.

Over the years, closures along Highway 97 including natural disasters such as landslides and human events including serious vehicle collisions and even security incidents, have left residents, businesses, and essential services isolated from Kelowna and the Central Okanagan. These disruptions have not only impacted the daily lives of residents but have also created significant economic hardship for South Okanagan businesses that rely on the movement of goods, access to health care, and the continuity of operations tied to Kelowna's role as a regional service hub.

While we understand that the full upgrading of Forest Service Road 201 into a permanent alternate route would be a massive undertaking that is not currently feasible, we are instead advocating for a practical and cost-effective interim measure. Specifically, we ask that the Ministry of Forests provide funding for regular snow removal on the Forest Service Road 201 to prevent snow accumulation from exceeding 25 centimeters. This measure would maintain the road in a condition that allows the Ministry of Transportation and Transit to activate it as a temporary alternate corridor within hours, rather than days, whenever Highway 97 closes for an extended period.

We further propose that this snow removal be contracted through Weyerhaeuser, the company currently holding the logging contract in that area and therefore responsible for the maintenance of FSR 201.

This approach offers a dual benefit:

1. It provides economic support for Weyerhaeuser and the broader forestry sector during a period of significant industry distress; and
2. It ensures the rapid operational readiness of Forest Service Road 201, safeguarding public mobility and economic continuity for the South Okanagan region.

The Chamber believes this modest investment in snow management would yield substantial returns in community resilience, regional safety, and economic stability. It represents a pragmatic step toward ensuring that residents and businesses throughout the South Okanagan are not once again left stranded during emergency closures of our only major transportation artery northward, such as on January 27, 2025, when the Bennett Bridge was closed due to a security incident involving possible explosives, and multiple vehicles required rescue services after attempting to drive on the unmaintained FSR 201.

While the Chamber will continue to advocate for a permanent solution, this proposed initiative would provide the means to activate the FSR 201 without delay, and therefore, allow residents to keep medical appointments and flights out of YLW, as well as the continued flow of goods and services.

We appreciate your ongoing attention to this matter and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with your Ministry.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Transportation and Transit
The Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
The Honourable Kelly Greene, Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly for Summerland-Penticton
ẏilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn Indian Band
His Worship Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton

PROTECTING ECONOMIC STABILITY AND EMERGENCY MOBILITY THROUGH SECONDARY TRANSPORTATION ROUTES

Issue

Communities across British Columbia that rely on a single highway corridor to connect with the next major urban centre face increasing economic and public safety risks due to recurring closures caused by wildfires, landslides, accidents, and security incidents. As climate-related events increase in frequency, ensuring both economic resiliency and environmental sustainability must be balanced in infrastructure planning. With health care, post-secondary education, supplies, and other essential services and products increasingly centralized in urban hubs, the absence of reliable and strategically prioritized secondary transportation options represents a critical infrastructure vulnerability requiring provincial action.

Background

Highway 97 serves as the sole north-south connector between Penticton and Kelowna. Over the past decade, this corridor has been repeatedly closed due to landslides[8], wildfires[9], collisions, and other emergency events[10]. During these closures, residents, businesses, emergency responders, and medical patients have been left without a safe and viable alternative route.

The lack of a maintained secondary corridor has resulted in:

1. **Supply Chain Disruption:** Businesses rely on predictable transportation for inventory, agricultural inputs, construction materials, and time-sensitive deliveries. Disruptions increase operating costs and reduce reliability in commercial contracts.
2. **Labour Market Constraints:** When employees cannot commute due to corridor closures, businesses face reduced productivity and service interruptions. This is particularly critical for health care workers, trades, tourism operators, and service-sector employees.
3. **Tourism Revenue Loss:** The South Okanagan's tourism sector depends heavily on seamless access from Kelowna International Airport and the Central Okanagan. Corridor closures reduce visitor confidence and redirect travel spending to other regions.
4. **Investor Confidence and Risk Perception:** Investors evaluate infrastructure redundancy when assessing regional expansion opportunities. Communities reliant on a single transportation corridor are perceived as higher-risk markets, particularly amid increasing climate-related events.
5. **Agricultural and Perishable Goods Risk:** The Okanagan's agricultural sector depends on reliable transportation for time-sensitive shipments. Even temporary closures can result in spoilage, missed export windows, and financial losses.

During closures of Highway 97, including the January 27, 2025 Bennett Bridge incident[11], motorists attempted to use FSR 201 in unsafe conditions[12], resulting in emergency rescue operations. Forest Service Roads are overseen by the Ministry of Forests, and maintenance responsibility lies with industrial users holding permits such as forest (logging) companies. FSR's are not built or maintained to the same standard as roads intended for public use[13].

This issue is not unique to the South Okanagan. In September 2025, Highway 20 connecting Bella Coola to Williams Lake was briefly closed due to the Beef Trail Creek wildfire.[14] While the closure only lasted for a day, it had

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[8] https://globalnews.ca/video/9927533/3000-cubic-metres-of-rock-closes-highway-97-between-summerland-and-peachland

[9] https://globalnews.ca/video/11312544/out-of-control-wildfire-buirning-near-peachland

[10] https://globalnews.ca/news/10982698/kelowna-bridge-closure-talks-second-crossing-bomb-squad/

[11] https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/587729/Transportation-story-of-the-year-Bennett-Bridge-bomb-scare

[12] https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/529943/Drivers-rescued-after-vehicles-became-stuck-on-201-Forest-Service-Road

[13] https://www.oag.bc.ca/app/uploads/sites/963/2024/08/OAGBC-20210119-Management-Forest-Service-Roads_RPT.pdf

[14] https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/evacuation-order-wildfire-cariboo-regional-district-sept-2-1.7623602

the potential to sever the community from the rest of British Columbia for an indefinite amount of time, and with it their economy which is based on eco- and adventure tourism, forestry, and commercial fishing and processing.

In June 2023, the Cameron Bluffs wildfire forced the closure of Highway 4, the only paved corridor linking Port Alberni, Tofino, and Ucluelet to the rest of Vancouver Island. The highway was closed for weeks and resulted in more than $60 million in lost revenue for those three communities[15], demonstrating the economic vulnerability of tourism and service-based economies when a single corridor fails.

Transportation redundancy is not a discretionary convenience, it is foundational economic infrastructure required to safeguard business continuity, protect jobs, and secure the long-term competitiveness of British Columbia's regional economies. Solutions must be scalable, cost-effective, and environmentally responsible.

The Chamber Recommends

That the Provincial Government:

1. Develop a targeted provincial resiliency framework that identifies and prioritizes communities most at risk due to single-corridor dependence, while integrating environmental and ecological considerations into infrastructure planning.
2. Prioritize the assessment and improvement of existing alternate routes — including select Forest Service Roads where feasible — focusing on safety, seasonal operability, and emergency readiness, rather than defaulting to new route construction.
3. Implement a phased and prioritized investment strategy that focuses first on high-risk corridors, supported by dedicated, multi-year funding tied to clear economic and safety outcomes.
4. Conduct formal cost-benefit and economic impact analyses that compare multiple solutions, including route improvements, mitigation strategies (e.g., slope stabilization, wildfire prevention), and demand management, to ensure the most effective use of public funds.
5. Collaborate with local governments, Indigenous communities, emergency services, and industry stakeholders to validate need, share data, and build broader provincial support for prioritized action.

Submitted by the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

[15] https://globalnews.ca/news/11092776/highway-4-closure-revenue-loss/

West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership

Issue

British Columbia's transportation network is critical to the movement of people, goods, emergency services, agricultural products, energy, and international trade. Increasingly frequent wildfires, floods, landslides, severe weather events, and major transportation incidents have exposed significant vulnerabilities within the province's highway, rail, and transportation infrastructure, disrupting businesses, supply chains, tourism, and essential services.

The South Okanagan is the largest population centre in British Columbia served by a single primary highway connection. When Highway 97 is closed, businesses experience shipment delays, increased transportation costs, cancelled travel, supply shortages, reduced tourism activity, and interruptions to daily operations. These disruptions demonstrate that transportation resilience is not only an infrastructure issue but also a matter of economic security and regional competitiveness.

The Chamber recognizes that transportation challenges affecting the South Okanagan originate throughout British Columbia's transportation network, particularly within the Fraser Valley and Canada's Pacific Gateway, where disruptions can have cascading economic consequences across the province and the country.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports the West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership (WCCRP) as a coordinated, long-term initiative to strengthen the resilience of British Columbia's critical transportation, energy, agricultural, and supply-chain infrastructure.

The Chamber advocates for sustained federal and provincial investment in resilient transportation corridors that improve emergency preparedness, protect Canada's supply chains, strengthen economic competitiveness, and ensure the uninterrupted movement of people and goods throughout British Columbia.

The Chamber further supports recognizing the West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership as a national infrastructure priority and encourages governments to work collaboratively with municipalities, Indigenous governments, industry, and regional partners to strengthen Canada's Pacific Gateway and its associated transportation networks.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- recognition of the West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership as a national infrastructure priority;
- sustained federal and provincial investment in resilient transportation infrastructure throughout British Columbia;
- strategic improvements to transportation corridors serving the Fraser Valley, the South Okanagan, and other critical provincial trade routes;
- long-term planning that incorporates climate adaptation, emergency preparedness, and infrastructure resilience into transportation investment decisions;
- coordinated infrastructure planning among federal, provincial, municipal, Indigenous, and regional partners;
- investments that improve the resilience of highways, bridges, rail infrastructure, ports, airports, pipelines, and other critical transportation assets;
- continued development of secondary transportation routes and alternative transportation corridors serving vulnerable regions of British Columbia;

- transportation infrastructure planning that protects supply chains, food security, emergency response capabilities, and economic competitiveness;
- regular assessment of transportation vulnerabilities and infrastructure risks associated with climate change and natural disasters; and
- federal infrastructure funding that recognizes the national economic importance of British Columbia's Pacific Gateway and transportation network.

Intended Outcome

A resilient, integrated, and future-ready transportation network that protects Canada's supply chains, supports emergency preparedness, strengthens regional and national economic competitiveness, enhances public safety, and ensures the reliable movement of people, goods, agricultural products, and essential services throughout British Columbia and Canada.

Status: Active

June 29, 2026

To: The Right Honourable Mark Carney
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2

Sent via email: mark.carney@parl.gc.ca

Re: NATIONAL ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITY – WEST COAST CORRIDOR RESILIENCY PARTNERSHIP (WCCRP)

Dear Prime Minister,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is taking this opportunity to express our strong support for the West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership (WCCRP), a collaborative initiative dedicated to strengthening Canada's economic resilience through strategic investments in critical transportation, energy, and agricultural infrastructure.

As the voice of nearly 500 businesses across the South Okanagan, our Chamber has become one of British Columbia's leading advocates for transportation resiliency. Over the past several years, we have worked with municipal, provincial, and federal governments to address the growing economic risks associated with increasingly frequent highway closures caused by floods, wildfires, landslides, severe weather, and major collisions. We have championed policies that strengthen emergency transportation planning and improve secondary transportation routes because our business community has experienced first-hand the consequences of infrastructure vulnerabilities.

The South Okanagan is the largest population centre in British Columbia that relies on a single primary highway connection to the rest of the province. When Highway 97 is closed, there is no equivalent alternative route capable of maintaining the uninterrupted movement of people, goods, emergency services, and commercial traffic. Businesses are forced to absorb shipment delays, increased transportation costs, cancelled travel, supply shortages, lost tourism revenue, and disruptions to daily operations. These events have demonstrated that transportation resiliency is not simply an infrastructure issue, it is an economic issue.

While our advocacy has focused on improving resiliency for the South Okanagan, we recognize that these challenges begin long before Highway 97 reaches our communities. The Fraser Valley corridor is one of Canada's most strategically important economic gateways, connecting the Port of Vancouver and the Lower Mainland to the rest of British Columbia and Canada. It serves as a vital corridor for domestic commerce, international trade, energy distribution, and agricultural production.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

The flooding events of 2021 and 2025 clearly demonstrated that failures within this corridor create cascading consequences across the country. Highway closures, damaged rail infrastructure, disrupted pipelines, and flooded agricultural lands affected businesses and communities hundreds of kilometres away, including those in the South Okanagan. These events exposed the reality that Canada's supply chains are only as resilient as their most vulnerable links.

The West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership represents exactly the type of coordinated, long-term approach required to address these vulnerabilities. By bringing together municipalities, governments, and stakeholders around a shared infrastructure vision, the Partnership recognizes that investments in resilient transportation networks strengthen Canada's economy, improve emergency preparedness, protect food security, reinforce energy reliability, and enhance our competitiveness in global markets.

From the perspective of our business community, investments in the Fraser Valley corridor are investments in every region of British Columbia. Improving the resilience of Canada's Pacific Gateway will strengthen the transportation systems that businesses across the province depend upon every day, regardless of their location.

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce respectfully encourages the Government of Canada to recognize the West Coast Corridor Resiliency Partnership as a national infrastructure priority and to provide the leadership and investment necessary to strengthen this critical economic corridor. The cost of proactive investment today will be far outweighed by the economic and social costs of future disruptions if these vulnerabilities remain unaddressed.

Canada's economy depends on reliable transportation infrastructure. Building resilience into our most important corridors is not simply an investment in roads and bridges—it is an investment in economic security, business confidence, public safety, and the long-term prosperity of communities from the Fraser Valley to the South Okanagan and beyond.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this important initiative. We appreciate the opportunity to express our support and look forward to seeing the Government of Canada work collaboratively with provincial and municipal partners to strengthen one of Canada's most important economic corridors.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: Federal Ministries:
The Honourable Steven MacKinnon, Minister of Transport
The Honourable Gregor Robertson, Minister of Housing and Infrastructure
The Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Finance and National Revenue
The Honourable Tim Hodgson, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources
The Honourable Heath MacDonald, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
The Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Public Safety
The Honourable Julie Dabrusin, Minister of Environment, Climate Change and Nature
The Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Industry
Helena Konanz, Member of Parliament for Similkameen–South Okanagan–West Kootenay

Provincial:
The Honourable Mike Farnworth, British Columbia's Minister of Transportation and Transit
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the Legislative Assembly Penticton-Summerland

Local Government:
Mayor Julius Bloomfield, City of Penticton
ẏilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn Indian Band
Mark Pendergraft, Chair of the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen (RDOS)

Air Transportation

Issue

Reliable commercial air service is essential to the economic vitality, competitiveness, and quality of life of the South Okanagan. Air transportation supports business travel, tourism, investment, healthcare access, education, emergency response, and connectivity between rural communities and major national and international transportation networks.

For communities such as Penticton, regional air service is more than a transportation convenience—it is critical economic infrastructure that enables businesses to compete, attracts visitors and investment, and connects residents to employment, specialized healthcare, government services, and family across Canada.

The reduction or loss of scheduled commercial air service can have significant economic consequences, particularly for rural and regional communities that depend upon convenient and reliable access to national transportation networks.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports maintaining and strengthening reliable, sustainable, and competitive commercial air service for Penticton Regional Airport.

The Chamber advocates for policies that recognize the importance of regional air transportation to rural economic development and encourage collaboration among airlines, airports, governments, and local stakeholders to preserve and expand regional connectivity.

The Chamber further supports federal transportation policies that recognize regional air service as an essential component of Canada's transportation system and encourage national air carriers to maintain meaningful service to rural communities.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- maintaining reliable scheduled commercial air service between Penticton and major Canadian transportation hubs;
- policies that recognize regional air transportation as essential economic infrastructure for rural and regional communities;
- collaboration among airlines, airport authorities, governments, Indigenous communities, tourism organizations, and the business community to strengthen long-term regional air service;
- continued federal recognition of the importance of regional air connectivity when developing aviation policy and providing support to Canada's air transportation sector;
- investments in Penticton Regional Airport that improve operational reliability, passenger experience, safety, and long-term capacity;
- initiatives that encourage increased passenger demand, route sustainability, and year-round service;
- transportation planning that integrates regional air service with other modes of transportation to improve connectivity throughout the South Okanagan;
- consultation with affected communities before significant reductions or discontinuation of scheduled commercial air service; and
- exploration of innovative partnerships and service models that improve the long-term sustainability of regional air transportation.

Intended Outcome

A reliable, accessible, and sustainable regional air transportation network that supports business competitiveness, tourism, healthcare, investment, workforce mobility, and the long-term economic prosperity of Penticton and the South Okanagan while ensuring rural communities remain connected to the national transportation system.

Status: Active

Media Coverage:

https://globalnews.ca/news/9958400/air-canada-pulls-out-penticton-pilot-shortage-backlash/

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/446521/Air-Canada-stopping-service-at-Penticton-Regional-Airport-in-2024#446521

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

September 13th, 2023

To: The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Transport Canada
Mr. Michael Rousseau, CEO of Air Canada

Re: Air Canada Discontinuing Service in Penticton, British Columbia

Dear Minister Rodriguez and Mr. Rousseau,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to express our deep concern and alarm over the recent news that Air Canada is planning to discontinue flights into rural Penticton, British Columbia, effective January 14th, 2024. Penticton, located in the heart of the Okanagan Valley, is a vibrant community that has relied on air connectivity to stay connected with the rest of Canada and the world. The decision to discontinue flights to and from Penticton is distressing for several reasons.

Firstly, Penticton serves as a gateway to one of Canada's most beautiful and economically significant regions. The Okanagan Valley is known for its thriving wine industry, stunning landscapes, and numerous tourism attractions and events such as the Ironman triathlon and the Okanagan Granfondo, which bring people from around the world. The availability of convenient air travel has played a vital role in supporting the tourism industry, local businesses, and residents who rely on travel for various personal and professional reasons.

Secondly, discontinuing flights into Penticton will have serious economic ramifications for region, which has a total population of over 62,000 people stretching from Summerland to Osoyoos, including Keremeos and Princeton. It will result in job losses and reduced opportunities for local businesses, including those in the hospitality and tourism sectors. Furthermore, it will inconvenience residents who depend on air travel for medical appointments, family visits, business meetings and other essential purposes, as driving to YLW Kelowna will add on a minimum of 1 hour 20 minutes driving time each way .

Lastly, discontinuing flights to Penticton goes against the spirit of supporting and connecting remote and rural communities. Canadians count on Air Canada as our national carrier to ensure connectivity across the country, bridging the gap between urban and rural centres. The decision to halt services to Penticton appears to be a departure from this commitment.

We understand that the airline industry has faced unprecedented challenges in recent times, especially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our federal government provided funding to Air Canada under the Large Employer Emergency Financing Facility to address some of these challenges. With this funding, Air Canada was required to restart service at a number of airports, including Penticton. According to the Government of Canada website[1], restarting vital domestic air services is listed as a term of the financial support to "ensure those Canadians

[1] https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2021/04/details-of-financial-support-to-air-canada.html

continue to have convenient access to their preferred airports and the flights they need." We urge you to reconsider this decision and explore alternative solutions to maintaining air connectivity to Penticton. Access to air travel options is vital to the well-being and prosperity of the people and businesses of this region.

The Chamber implores you both to engage with local authorities, businesses, and residents to find a sustainable way to continue flights from Vancouver to Penticton and vice-versa. Your leadership in this matter could make a profound difference in preserving the connectivity and economic viability of this region.

We appreciate your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

Nicole Clark
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (British Columbia)
Mr. Dan Ashton, MLA Penticton
Mr. Richard Cannings, MP for South Okanagan – West Kootenay
Mr. Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: September 13, 2023
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Air Canada Discontinuing Service to Penticton

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is both deeply concerned and alarmed over Air Canada's decision to discontinue service in Penticton effective January 14th, 2024. This development raises significant concerns for both the local community and the broader economic landscape of the Okanagan Valley.

"Air Canada has been a vital link connecting Penticton and the Okanagan Valley to the rest of Canada and the world. The decision to cease operations in this region threatens to have far-reaching implications, both in the economic impact as well as accessibility and community isolation," states Nicole Clark, Chamber President.

Penticton and the surrounding area rely heavily on tourism, with the South Okanagan being a premier wine and tourism destination. The discontinuation of flights to Penticton could result in severe economic consequences, including job losses and reduced opportunities for local businesses, particularly those in the hospitality and tourism sectors who rely on out-of-town and international visitors. Penticton is currently the host city to both Ironman and the Granfondo Okanagan, with many participants coming from Vancouver's International Airport via Air Canada. Our conference facilities, which help bolster our shoulder seasons, could also be affected by this decision, and our internationally renowned wineries rely on out-of-town and out-of-country guests into their tasting rooms.

The discontinuation of Air Canada flights also creates accessibility challenges for residents, visitors, and businesses alike. Many individuals depend on air travel to Vancouver for essential purposes such as medical appointments, family visits, and business-related activities. The loss of this crucial transportation link will hinder the region's ability to thrive and grow, especially as our highways continue to be impacted by climate-related events such as landslides and atmospheric rivers.

"We implore Air Canada to reconsider this decision and engage in discussions with local authorities, businesses, and residents to explore alternative solutions to mitigate whatever factors led Air Canada to this decision," says Michael Magnusson, the Chamber's Executive Director. "We also call upon Air Canada to uphold its legacy as a national carrier that values the connectivity of remote and rural communities, especially in these challenging times."

Back in 2021, the Federal Government provided funding to Air Canada under the Large Employer Emergency Financing Facility to assist the airline in facing recent and unprecedented challenges primarily caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With this funding, which included a $4 billion repayable loan and an equity investment of $500 million in Class B voting shares, Air Canada was specifically required to resume service in 13 cities, including Penticton.[1]

The upside is that the Chamber knows that demand for flights to- and from Vancouver is high and will only continue to increase based on population growth as well as the popularity of our region and its events and facilities. If Air Canada does not reverse their decision, then the Chamber is confident another provider will come in and fill that void by the time January 14th, 2024 comes around.

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For more information, contact:

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
mmagnusson@penticton.org

Nicole Clark, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
nclark@cfokanagan.com

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is a dynamic, trusted and respected business authority representing approximately 500 local business and non-profit members that drive economic and social growth and improvement on behalf of, and in support of our members and the community.

[1] https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/news/2021/04/details-of-financial-support-to-air-canada.html

David Rheault
Vice-président - Relations avec les gouvernements et les collectivités
Vice President, Government and Community Relations

Centre Air Canada
7373 boul. de la Côte-Vertu O.
Saint-Laurent, QC H4S 1Z3

Téléphone: (514) 422-2549
Adresse électronique: David.rheault@aircanada.ca

September 21, 2023

Nicole Clark, President
Community Futures Okanagan Similkameen
103-3115 Skaha Lake Rd
Penticton, BC V2A 6G5

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
185 Lakeshore Drive W
Penticton, BC V2A 1B7

SENT BY EMAIL: nclark@cfokanagan.com; mmagnusson@penticton.org

Dear Ms. Clark & Mr. Magnusson,

I am writing in response to your letter dated September 13th, 2023, addressed to our CEO, Michael Rousseau. Mr. Rousseau has reviewed the letter and asked that I respond on his behalf.

We appreciate you taking the time to write to us to express your concerns. We regret having to make the difficult decision of suspending services at Penticton Airport effective mid-January 2024 and its impact on the local Penticton community. However, faced with the current regional pilot shortage, we have had to review our network schedule to ensure resources are deployed most efficiently and productively.

Moreover, while Kelowna is not as close to all communities in the area served by the Penticton airport, the overall region will continue to be served at the Kelowna airport, which has a catchment area that compares to many other regional markets we serve in Canada and from which we offer direct services to Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal, providing residents and businesses of the Okanagan extensive connectivity across our global network.

Finally, regarding the financial support Air Canada received from the Federal government during the pandemic, we underline that Air Canada has fully abided by all its obligations. It should also be noted that Air Canada exited this financial support in November of 2021, having only accessed the credit facility solely dedicated to refunding customers' non-refundable tickets.

While our decision to suspend our services at Penticton airport has been finalized, we appreciate this is not the outcome you were hoping for. We thank you for giving us the opportunity to outline our reasons for this decision and how we plan to serve the overall Okanagan community.

Yours sincerely,

David Rheault
Vice President, Government and Community Relations

cc: The Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure (British Columbia)
Mr. Dan Ashton, MLA Penticton
Mr. Richard Cannings, MP for South Okanagan – West Kootenay
Mr. Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton

Pillar 5 – Economic Development & Tourism

A strong, diverse, and resilient economy is essential to Penticton's long-term prosperity, quality of life, and ability to provide opportunities for residents, businesses, and future generations.

The Chamber supports policies that strengthen Penticton's economy through investment, entrepreneurship, tourism, innovation, workforce development, and sustainable business growth. Economic development should support existing businesses while creating the conditions necessary to attract new investment, encourage business formation, and diversify the local economy.

The Chamber recognizes that economic development and tourism are influenced by:

- business attraction, retention, and expansion;
- investment readiness and availability of employment lands;
- entrepreneurship and small-business development;
- tourism, events, festivals, sport, and visitor experiences;
- agriculture, wine, hospitality, and other key regional industries;
- workforce availability, skills development, and talent attraction;
- transportation and regional accessibility;
- housing availability and affordability;
- regulatory efficiency and development approval processes;
- infrastructure, utilities, and servicing capacity;
- access to capital, technology, and innovation;
- downtown vitality and commercial activity;
- regional, Indigenous, and intergovernmental partnerships; and
- Penticton's reputation as a place to visit, invest, work, and do business.

Convention Centre and Conference Facilities

Issue

Business events, conferences, conventions, and meetings are important drivers of Penticton's year-round economy. They generate significant economic activity for hotels, restaurants, wineries, retailers, transportation providers, attractions, and other tourism-related businesses, while helping diversify the visitor economy beyond the traditional summer tourism season.

Although Penticton has established itself as a recognized destination for meetings and conferences through the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre, the Penticton Lakeside Resort, and Travel Penticton's "Meet in Penticton" program, the community's ability to compete for larger conferences and business events is constrained by the absence of an attached convention hotel and a sufficient inventory of nearby accommodation.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports investments that strengthen Penticton's convention, conference, and business events infrastructure, including the development of additional hotel accommodation that enhances the community's ability to attract provincial, national, and international meetings, conventions, and major events.

The Chamber supports the construction of a hotel directly adjacent to and connected with the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre, as we recognize the significant economic opportunities such an investment could provide for the community.

Intended Outcome

Increased year-round visitation and economic activity.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

April 15, 2024

To: Mayor Bloomfield and Esteemed Council
Cc: Anthony Haddad, CAO

Re: LETTER OF SUPPORT for NOTICE of MOTION REGARDING POSSIBILITY OF HOTEL TO BE LOCATED AND ATTACHED TO THE PENTICTON TRADE AND CONVENTION CENTRE

Good Day Mayor and Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to voice its support of Councillor Isaac Gilbert's Notice of Motion which, if passed, would direct staff to look into the possibility of placing a hotel directly beside and attached to the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre.

Penticton's convention facilities both at the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre and at the Penticton Lakeside Resort, in concert with Travel Penticton's 'Meet in Penticton' Convention Bureau, have all done an outstanding job of extending our tourism season well into the colder months thanks to the many conferences they have attracted to our city. That said, we also know that we are not yet reaching our full economic potential due to the fact that the Trade and Convention Centre does not have an attached hotel.

As some of you know from your own experience, tight agendas or inclement weather make staying in an off-site hotel undesirable if not altogether unfeasible. Organizers recognize this and will often choose an all-in-one hotel and conference facility even if it means selecting another city. We also need more hotel rooms in order to attract large scale conferences, which we learned first-hand when the B.C. Chamber was forced to select Kelowna for this year's AGM and Policy Session taking place at the end of May due to Penticton not having the required occupancy to house a conference of this size.

Given that this motion is fact-finding and non-binding in nature, we very much hope Mayor and Council will voice their approval, and from there, we look forward to learning just how viable it would be to compliment our city-owned convention centre with an attached hotel.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

July 31, 2026

To: Mayor Julius Bloomfield and Members of Council
City of Penticton
171 Main Street, Penticton B.C. V2A 5A9

Re: SUPPORT FOR A REFERENDUM ON AN ATTACHED HOTEL AT THE PENTICTON TRADE AND CONVENTION CENTRE

Dear Mayor Bloomfield and Esteemed Council,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is writing to express our strong support for Council to proceed with a referendum that would allow residents to determine whether an attached hotel should be developed adjacent to the Penticton Trade and Convention Centre.

Business events and conferences generate significant year-round economic activity by filling hotel rooms, restaurants, retailers, wineries, attractions, and transportation services—particularly during the shoulder seasons when leisure tourism is traditionally slower. An attached hotel would strengthen Penticton's ability to compete for larger provincial, national, and international meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (MICE), while enhancing the long-term viability of our convention centre.

The competitive landscape is changing rapidly. Kelowna has recently unveiled ambitious plans for a new conference centre featuring approximately 80,000 square feet of conference space and a 300-room hotel, with the stated goal of attracting national conferences that are currently choosing other destinations. As neighbouring and other communities in British Columbia continue investing in conference infrastructure, Penticton risks gradually losing market share if we fail to evolve alongside them.

This is not simply about constructing a hotel, it is about protecting one of Penticton's most important economic sectors. Conference organizers increasingly expect integrated facilities where delegates can stay, meet, dine, and network in one location. Communities that provide this experience are better positioned to secure high-value events that generate lasting economic benefits throughout the local economy.

The Chamber recognizes that this is a significant investment and believes taxpayers deserve the opportunity to decide whether this project aligns with Penticton's long-term economic vision. Proceeding with a referendum is a transparent and responsible way to allow residents to make an informed decision about an investment that could strengthen our community's competitiveness for decades to come.

We respectfully encourage Council to move forward with the referendum and provide the public with the opportunity to determine whether Penticton should invest in maintaining its position as one of British Columbia's premier event and conference destinations.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Emergency Tourism Measures and Travel Restrictions

Issue

Tourism is a foundational component of the South Okanagan economy. During emergencies, governments may be required to implement extraordinary measures to protect public safety and support emergency response operations. However, broad travel restrictions can have significant unintended economic consequences for tourism-dependent businesses, hospitality providers, wineries, retailers, restaurants, event organizers, and the regional workforce.

The Chamber recognizes that emergency management decisions must prioritize the protection of life and public safety. At the same time, emergency measures should be based on timely, accurate information and should minimize unnecessary disruption to businesses and local economies whenever possible.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports emergency management decisions that are evidence-based, proportionate, geographically targeted, and informed by real-time operational data.

The Chamber believes that broad travel restrictions should only be implemented where clearly necessary to support emergency response operations or protect public safety, and only after available accommodation capacity, evacuation requirements, local conditions, and regional economic impacts have been carefully assessed.

Where emergency measures result in significant and unavoidable economic losses, governments should work collaboratively with affected industries to provide timely communication, meaningful consultation where practical, and appropriate financial recovery support.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- emergency management decisions that are informed by real-time operational data and accommodation capacity;
- the use of targeted and proportionate emergency measures whenever practical, rather than broad regional restrictions;
- meaningful consultation with affected local governments, tourism organizations, accommodation providers, and business representatives whenever operationally feasible;
- improved coordination between emergency management agencies, municipalities, destination management organizations, and the hospitality sector;
- enhanced data collection regarding accommodation availability and evacuee needs to support evidence-based decision-making;
- timely, accurate, and transparent communication with businesses, residents, and visitors during emergency events;
- periodic review of emergency management protocols following significant emergency events;
- financial assistance programs for businesses that experience substantial economic losses resulting directly from government-imposed emergency measures; and
- ongoing collaboration to ensure emergency preparedness protects both public safety and the long-term economic resilience of British Columbia's tourism communities.

Intended Outcome

An emergency management framework that protects life and public safety while ensuring that travel restrictions and other extraordinary measures are based on accurate information, implemented only when necessary, communicated effectively, and designed to minimize avoidable economic harm to businesses, workers, residents, and visitors.

Status: Active / Monitoring

Media Coverage:

https://globalnews.ca/video/9930836/south-okanagan-tourism-hard-hit-by-travel-ban/

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/443121/Penticton-businesses-worried-about-echoing-impact-of-travel-ban

https://www.pentictonwesternnews.com/news/penticton-businesses-need-help-more-than-ever-as-wildfires-cancel-events-chamber/

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: August 23, 2023
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

LOCAL BUSINESSES NEED HELP MORE THAN EVER

Although the Travel Ban has been lifted, its affects will continue to be felt for the remainder of Penticton's high season. The loss of Ironman and many other tourist bookings are leaving businesses with a void in customers that the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is urging locals to fill.

"It isn't often that we have an opportunity in August, on what would be Ironman weekend of all times, to be a tourist in our own City," says Nicole Clark, President of the Chamber. "And while we know that we can't replace all of the traffic the last two weeks in August brings to Penticton, this is the time to show our restaurants, our wineries, and all those recreation, adventure, and retail outlets that we value and support them."

Unfortunately, the loss for tourist-dependent industries like hotels and wineries is quite significant.

"A signature event like Ironman is something that we bank on because it provides our tourist and hospitality-based businesses with that financial injection they need to help pay their fixed costs during the offseason," explains Michael Magnusson, the Chamber's Executive Director. "Instituting a travel ban that resulted in Ironman's cancellation and curtailed other visitors coming into our City, especially when we see how very little the actual need was for these rooms, is both confusing and disheartening to say the least. I think we all believed that when the provincial government imposed the ban, there was a very real and urgent need to provide shelter to hundreds of people displaced by the wildfire."

Hotels were quick to inform and vacate their guests when the travel ban was announced, followed by processing the cancellation of hundreds of room nights in expectation that droves of evacuees would soon be arriving, however, those rooms continue to sit empty at a cost of hundreds of thousands in lost revenues to accommodators in August alone.

Another unintended result of the travel ban is the abuse being aimed at front-line workers. The Chamber has heard from multiple businesses of customers yelling and making threats when demanding their non-refundable deposit be returned.

"What I am looking for, not just for my company but for all my fellow tourism operators, owners, and employees, is empathy," says Lyndie Hill, Chamber Director and owner of Hoodoo Adventures. "I am asking customers to go back and read the cancellation policy they agreed to at the time of their purchase before threatening the young staff member on the other end of the phone that you are going to tarnish the good name of the business they work for, online, and to the public. I am asking that people understand we have had to implement non-refundable deposits because of the uncertainty that now exists in order to protect our businesses whenever tragedy, like fires, floods, and pandemics, exist. It is why we encourage people to get trip cancellation insurance. This is of course a terrible situation for all, but I ask for everyone's support in keeping our businesses' doors open after so many years of hardships and to have some understanding for the enormity of what they are facing."

The Chamber will be joining the Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association and the B.C. Hotel Association in advocating for the financial support that is necessary to offset the losses incurred by the travel ban.

In the meantime, the Chamber wishes to extend its gratitude to all of the structural and wildland firefighters who are working to protect homes and critical infrastructure, and our hearts go out to everyone impacted by the wildfires both to the north and south of us.

###

For more information, contact:

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
mmagnusson@penticton.org

Nicole Clark, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
nclark@cfokanagan.com

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is a dynamic, trusted and respected business authority representing approximately 500 local business and non-profit members that drive economic and social growth and improvement on behalf of, and in support of our members and the community.

Penticton, BC – Media Release

For Immediate Release: February 22, 2024
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Future Emergency Measures Must Be Based on Real-time Information and Needs

Before the 2024 wildfire season begins, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce has written the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness Bowinn Ma seeking assurance that more effective protocols and accountabilities will be put into place before an emergency measure like a travel ban is ordered.

"When Minister Ma ordered the travel ban last August, the intent was to open up hotel space for those evacuating West Kelowna's McDougall Creek Wildfire. If anyone from her ministry had first taken the small step of contacting our municipal government, they would have learned that spaces already available for evacuees were all but empty and should have made them question if ordering such a drastic measure in Penticton and throughout the South Okanagan was necessary?" says Michael Magnusson, the Chamber's Executive Director.

Instead, the government moved forward with a travel ban on August 19th at the height of Penticton's tourism season and resulted in the cancellation of the Ironman Triathlon to be held later that week along with millions of dollars in lost economic activity. Originally announced to run until September 4th, it was only four days later that the ban was lifted after it was clear how unneeded it was.

"The Chamber wants to ensure that the provincial government has developed a much more comprehensive process before a measure as serious and economically devastating as a travel ban can be ordered," states Chamber President Nicole Clark.

The Chamber has proposed that the government analyze real-time information provided by evacuation centres and their online Evacuee Registration and Assistance (ERA) site, which may require additional questions to determine accommodation needs and locations. Data should also be gathered from surrounding local governments along with hotels/motels to measure the current number of available accommodations, and to use public spaces first.

"Setting up these kinds of information gathering and analytical tools before we're into another wildfire season will allow the government to more accurately assess what emergency measures are actually needed," Magnusson believes.

The Chamber recognizes that hindsight is 20/20 but remains disappointed that since the travel ban was lifted after only four days, Minister Ma has never answered questions posed by the tourism industry as to how the ban was ordered in the first place, nor has there been discussions around providing compensation for the financial losses incurred by local operators as a result of the ban.

With a lower-than-average snowpack creating an even more extreme risk of wildfires this year, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce has asked the provincial government to assure local businesses, particularly those in the tourism and hospitality industry, that the government has modified their protocols to produce much more balanced and effective actions in emergency situations.

"With wildfires becoming an annual occurrence, we want to ensure that decisions are made quickly, and also accurately." concludes Clark. "If last year demonstrated anything, it was that a little more information could have prevented a lot of hardship for Penticton and the South Okanagan."

###

For more information, contact:

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
mmagnusson@penticton.org

Nicole Clark, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
nclark@cfokanagan.com

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is a dynamic, trusted and respected business authority representing approximately 500 local business and non-profit members that drive economic and social growth and improvement on behalf of, and in support of our members and the community.

BRITISH
COLUMBIA

May 15th, 2024 Reference: 640794

Michael Magnusson
Executive Director
The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
Email: mmagnusson@penticton.org

Dear Michael Magnusson:

Thank you for your correspondence received on February 22nd, 2024, addressed to myself, The Honourable Brenda Bailey, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation, The Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport, MLA Dan Ashton, and the City of Penticton Mayor and Council, concerning the 2023 travel ban in the southern interior. I am responding on behalf of the Ministers.

In the summer of 2023, the potential for a rapid evacuation of tens thousands of people in the Central Okanagan and Columbia Shuswap area within a 24-hour period led to the declaration of a provincial state of emergency on August 18th, 2023. On August 19th, the overall BC population on evacuation order was approximately 29,000 people, with an additional 36,000 people on evacuation alert, with most of these people located in the southern interior. Reports from senior leaders of emergency response providers cited further concerns about a lack of accommodations for incoming emergency response personnel as well as growing pressures on critical services due to the continued influx of people into affected areas.

Because of the volatility of the situation and the potential for continued large-scale evacuations, the declaration of a provincial state of emergency was followed by an emergency order on August 19th, 2023. The emergency order created a temporary prohibition on travel to the southern interior except for essential purposes. In addition to the order, steps were taken to rapidly scale up lodging options, including group lodging.

I respect your concerns regarding a lack of consultation on the travel order in the southern interior. When responding to emergencies, efforts are made to work closely with partners and other levels of government to limit disruption to the lives of citizens and economic impacts. However, at times it is necessary to act quickly and use emergency powers to meet evacuees' immediate needs and reduce suffering. I sincerely regret that your community and members of the Penticton and Wine Country Chamber of Commerce were impacted by the response to these emergencies.

Ministry of
Emergency Management
and Climate Readiness

Office of the Minister

Mailing Address:
Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC V8V 1X4

Recognizing that fulsome engagement with partners can be difficult during an active response that involves many communities and reflecting our government's commitment to continuous improvement, The Ministry of Emergency Management Climate Readiness (EMCR) in alignment with the Premier's Expert Task Force on Emergencies met with emergency management leadership from many communities, including Penticton, following the wildfire season to identify opportunities to be implemented in 2024.

EMCR continues to work closely with the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport and members of the BC Tourism Emergency Management Committee to address key learnings from the experiences of last year, including supporting discussions on enhanced communications for residents and visitors alike as well as opportunities to strengthen coordination of commercial lodging used to support evacuees during emergency events. The BC Hotel Association is leading the development of an online reservation system that will be piloted in traditional host communities this summer and is funded by the Province. This system is intended to offer hotel suppliers and Emergency Support Services responders an enhanced method of sourcing appropriate accommodation for evacuees.

EMCR continues efforts to improve supports for large scale evacuations during emergency events and strengthen partnerships in areas that may be impacted.

Thank you again for taking the time to write.

Sincerely,

Bowinn Ma
Minister of Emergency Management
and Climate Readiness

CC: The Honourable Brenda Bailey, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
The Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Dan Ashton, MLA, Penticton
Julius Bloomfield, Mayor, City of Penticton
City of Penticton Councilors
Nicole Clark, Business Advisor Training Manager, Community Futures
Okanagan Similkameen

Pillar 6 – Agriculture and Natural Resources

Agriculture is a foundational component of the South Okanagan economy and an important part of the region's identity, employment base, tourism industry, food security, and long-term economic prosperity.

The Chamber supports policies that protect and strengthen the long-term viability and competitiveness of agriculture while balancing responsible environmental stewardship, natural-resource management, and sustainable economic development.

The Chamber recognizes that agriculture and natural-resource policy are influenced by:

- agricultural land availability and productive use;
- water security, irrigation, and watershed management;
- climate resilience and extreme-weather events;
- crop insurance and agricultural risk-management programs;
- labour availability, including seasonal and temporary workers;
- production, transportation, and operating costs;
- access to domestic and international markets;
- interprovincial trade and direct-to-consumer sales;
- food processing and value-added agricultural production;
- innovation, technology, and agricultural productivity;
- wildfire prevention, mitigation, and recovery;
- responsible land, forest, and natural-resource management;
- environmental stewardship and biodiversity; and
- the relationship between agriculture, tourism, hospitality, and the regional economy.

Wine Industry Sustainability and Resilience

Issue

The wine and grape industry is one of the South Okanagan's most important economic sectors, contributing significantly to employment, tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, hospitality, and regional identity. The industry supports thousands of jobs throughout British Columbia and plays a vital role in attracting visitors, supporting local businesses, and strengthening the provincial economy.

In recent years, the industry has experienced unprecedented challenges, including extreme weather events, crop losses, climate change, wildfire impacts, labour shortages, rising production costs, supply chain disruptions, interprovincial trade barriers, and changing consumer markets. These challenges have highlighted the need for long-term policies that strengthen the resilience and competitiveness of British Columbia's wine industry.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports policies that ensure the long-term sustainability, resilience, and international competitiveness of British Columbia's wine and grape industry.

The Chamber believes governments should work collaboratively with wineries, grape growers, industry associations, Indigenous communities, tourism organizations, and local governments to develop policies that strengthen climate resilience, support business continuity, encourage innovation, protect agricultural production, and enhance wine tourism.

The Chamber recognizes that extraordinary circumstances may require temporary regulatory flexibility to ensure the continued viability of wineries while preserving the integrity and reputation of British Columbia wines.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- continued provincial and federal investment in programs that strengthen the long-term sustainability and competitiveness of British Columbia wineries and grape growers;
- improvements to Production Insurance, AgriStability, AgriRecovery, and other business risk management programs that adequately reflect the unique needs of vineyards and wineries;
- long-term climate adaptation initiatives, including vineyard renewal, research, innovation, frost mitigation technologies, and the introduction of climate-resilient grape varieties;
- temporary regulatory flexibility during extraordinary agricultural events, including crop failures caused by extreme weather, disease, or other circumstances beyond the control of producers;
- maintaining regulatory pathways that allow wineries to temporarily utilize out-of-province grapes or other approved production methods during periods of severe grape shortages while protecting the integrity and reputation of British Columbia wines;
- regulatory modernization that supports business viability while preserving the land-based winery model and encouraging continued investment in British Columbia grape production;
- continued review of minimum production requirements to ensure regulations remain responsive during exceptional agricultural circumstances;
- policies that enhance the visitor experience at wineries, encourage agritourism, and strengthen the economic contribution of wine tourism throughout British Columbia;
- collaboration between governments and industry to reduce interprovincial trade barriers affecting British Columbia wineries and to expand market access for British Columbia wines across Canada;

- investment in research, innovation, workforce development, and sustainable agricultural practices that improve the long-term resilience of the sector; and
- ongoing consultation with industry stakeholders when developing legislation, regulations, and support programs affecting wineries and grape growers.

Intended Outcome

A resilient, competitive, and internationally recognized British Columbia wine industry that continues to support agricultural production, employment, tourism, private investment, exports, and the long-term economic prosperity of the South Okanagan while adapting successfully to changing environmental and market conditions.

Status: Achieved and Monitoring

Media Coverage:

https://globalnews.ca/news/9853816/okanagan-vintners-need-help-cold-snap/

https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/438940/It-s-a-scary-time-South-Okanagan-wineries-plead-for-flexibility-from-government#438940

https://www.pentictonwesternnews.com/news/south-okanagan-chambers-request-help-for-wineries-after-grape-crops-decimated/

July 24, 2023

To: The Honourable Pam Alexis, Minister of Agriculture
Re: Requesting Support and Temporary Changes to Legislation for B.C. Wineries Devastated by Last Winter's Cold Snap

Dear Minister Alexis,

The Penticton & Wine Country and South Okanagan Chambers of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to jointly and respectfully ask for your assistance regarding the devastating cold snap that occurred during the winter of 2022/23, with the Wine Growers of British Columbia (WGBC) reporting a 54% reduction in grape crops for 2023 and 45% of total planted acreage suffering long-term damage and 29% of total acreage needing to be re-planted.

The impacts resulting from this damage are multifaceted and will significantly affect the South Okanagan's economy, including but not limited to:

1. A loss of $133 million in revenues for the sector as reported by the WGBC.
2. A 20% reduction in full-time employment in vineyards and winery staff province-wide.
3. Over $200 million in indirect economic revenue loss to suppliers, B.C. LDB and private retail outlets, restaurants, and other businesses throughout the province including the South Okanagan.
4. The potential for smaller wineries to go out of business, which will negatively impact the South Okanagan's tourism.

With regards to revenue loss, we learned that it takes up to 5 years before grape crops reach 100% production, with graduated levels beginning in year 2. The cost of each plant is approximately twice as much as current crop insurance provides (for those who have insurance), and new crops require significantly more labour over the 5-year growth period than mature plants. Furthermore, initial estimates for those in the market for purchasing B.C. grown grapes from other vineyards, which are already some of the most expensive grapes in the world, are seeing a 50% cost increase vs 2022.

Those added product and labour costs, combined with decreased revenues and high interest rates on any loans wineries may need to take to weather the next 5 years will be extremely difficult, and while we truly appreciate both the province and federal governments in having extended the deadline to June 30th for applications to AgriStability insurance, we are hopeful that the Provincial Government will be able to further support B.C. winemakers by implementing the following initiatives:

1. Modify the current provincial LCRB regulation to wineries affected by crop damage by granting a grace period of 3 years to produce a minimum 0 litres of wine while still retaining their manufacturing

license. Currently, wineries are mandated to produce 4,500 litres of wine which simply may not be possible for those who have had to replant a third or more of their total crops.

2. Suspend the LDB's requirement for 25% of grapes used in production to be grown from one's own acreage for the next 3 years, with the caveat that production be capped at the respective winery's prior year's total litres produced (or an average of total litres produced based on the past several years).
3. Expand the Perennial Crop Renewal Program to make resilient and climate-friendly crops available to all B.C. winemakers.
4. Create a grant program for wineries who either install electric wind machines which are useful in reducing frost, or convert their current wind machines from propane to electric power to provide measures to mitigate climate change and reduce dependency on fossil fuels.
5. Advocate for the Federal Government to provide financial assistance through grants and/or no (or low) interest loans similar to the CEBA program for wineries affected by crop damage to help cover:
    a. Costs of new plants;
    b. Costs of labour in planting and nurturing new crops to maturity;
    c. Loss of revenues;
6. Further advocate the Federal Government to:
    a. Expand the AgriRecovery program to fully support wineries in addition to grape growers.
    b. Repeal, or at the very least, suspend the excise tax during this time where wineries and vineyards are being devastated and forced to rapidly adapt to climate change.

We need to protect and continue to grow our internationally recognized region that significantly contributes to an annual $3.75 billion dollar industry where 90% of the B.C.'s vineyards are located in the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys. It is with optimism and urgency that we reach out to you with the aim that our proposed initiatives will be adopted and provide the needed relief for our devastated vineyards and wineries to recover and come back stronger than before.

Yours Sincerely,

Nicole Clark

Nicole Clark,
President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Ryan Duffy,
President
South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce

Denise Blashko

Denise Blashko,
Executive Director
South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce

BRITISH
COLUMBIA

VIA EMAIL Ref.: 662336

June 20, 2024

Nicole Clark, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
185 Lakeshore Drive
Penticton BC V2A 1B7
Email: nclark@cfokanagan.com

Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
185 Lakeshore Drive
Penticton BC V2A 1B7
Email: mmagnusson@penticton.org

Dear Nicole Clark and Michael Magnusson:

Thank you for your letter of February 20, 2024, addressed to us, regarding the current challenges facing British Columbia (B.C.) wineries and your recommendations for supporting the industry. As the Ministers responsible for liquor licensing and regulation and tourism, arts, and culture, we are pleased to respond with input from our colleagues.

We want to ensure you know that our government remains committed to working with B.C. wineries and grape growers to guarantee the long-term sustainability and success of a fundamental industry in our province.

We recognize that the wine industry has been significantly impacted by several factors over the past couple of years, including vine damage and crop loss from the 2022 and 2024 freeze events and by agricultural diseases. These challenges have been exacerbated by the 2023 wildfires, impacting tourism and grape production. Many B.C. grape growers and wineries are now grappling with production shortages, and our government is committed to supporting the industry in the face of these challenges.

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Supports for B.C. grape growers
Impacted grape growers can access support through federal-provincial income protection and insurance programs like Production Insurance and AgriStability, which provide eligible growers with financial assistance in the event of income decline due to crop loss.

The Government of British Columbia's Production Insurance program has had 589 grape and vine loss claims for the 2023 crop year, and paid over $24 million to growers, with an additional $2.7 million expected to be paid once growers submit final loss information. It is also estimated that once the growers file their taxes, over $500,000 in AgriStability payments will be provided to grape growers to help offset losses experienced in 2023.

As recently announced, our government is also embarking on a new enhanced replant program. This program will provide as much as $70 million to help producers replace damaged, diseased and low-producing vines, plants, and trees with climate-resilient varieties that produce in-demand, premium fruit. Government staff will work with industry associations to develop planting guidelines to ensure replanted varieties have enhanced adaptability and performance in the face of climate change, pests, disease, and market pressures. Producers will make replant choices based on the best available agronomic science to ensure they can handle extreme weather events. Application information will be available as soon as the guidelines are established.

Minimum production requirements
The Liquor and Cannabis Regulation Branch (LCRB) is currently reviewing the policy that requires wineries to produce at least 4,500 litres of their own wine on-site each year. The LCRB considers exemption requests in cases of crop failure, standard agricultural practices that result in the temporary loss of sufficient products, or other events that are beyond licensees' control. For 2024, the LCRB is exempting this requirement for wineries that experienced crop failure and continues to engage with Wine Growers BC on amending the production requirement in the future.

Additionally, wineries were invited to complete a survey to share their opinion about the exemption and whether they anticipate needing an exemption in the future. The survey results will be evaluated to help inform the exemption process.

Visitor experience at manufacturing sites
Our government has recently changed the regulatory framework for liquor manufacturers, creating more flexibility to enrich the on-site visitor experience at liquor manufacturing sites like wineries, breweries, and distilleries in time for the 2024 summer season. Some of the changes will enable tastings as well as packaged sales to be conducted almost anywhere at wineries with the exception of parking lots and roadways for example. We expect these and other changes made to boost tourism and income opportunities for the sector.

More information about these changes and the replant program can be found in this recent announcement: https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024AF0006-000340

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Land-based winery (LBW) and commercial winery requirements
We are listening to the industry so we can take actions that can have the best outcomes. For example, if a land-based winery (LBW) chooses, they can contact the BC Liquor Distribution Branch (LDB) to request conversion to a commercial winery classification which would allow them to use out-of-province inputs and grape juice or wine from other commercial wineries. The LBW would be subject to the commercial winery sales agreement for the duration of the conversion. To convert back to the LBW classification, the winery must meet all the LBW criteria, including depleting all wine made with non-B.C. grapes.

Additionally, to support LBWs being impacted by the grape shortage in B.C., the LDB has informed LBWs of the option to apply for a one-year exemption to the LBW criteria that 25 percent of their manufactured input must come from owned or leased land in B.C., if they anticipate difficulty meeting this requirement. If granted, the LBW would retain its LBW classification and associated benefits.

The Government is also prioritizing work to explore additional support in response to the grape shortage, in response to recent requests from industry. This work will involve cross-government collaboration as well as industry consultation.

Following completion of the above, the LDB will also review the winery sales agreements, which will include industry consultation related to a recent request that the LDB amend the LBW sales agreement criteria so that a LBW can maintain its classification and benefits upon entering into common ownership with a commercial winery.

Tourism
Wine tourism is an integral part of the diverse tourism experience offered throughout B.C. and is prominent in Destination BC's seasonal marketing campaigns, like Explore BC, designed to help drive spring, fall and winter visitation to and within the province. Since 2012, Destination BC has invested nearly $2.5 million in cooperative marketing funding directly to the B.C. wine tourism sector through the Experience BC Program and the Co-op Marketing Partnerships Program. Since 2016, Destination BC has invested over $10 million through the Co-operative Marketing Partnerships Program to directly support marketing for wine, agri-tourism, culinary and food initiatives across the province, and most recently over $1.1 million for 2024/25 which includes $250,000 to the Wine Growers of BC.

Destination BC supports the wine tourism sector in several other ways, including the recent delivery of a new Experience Development program called Cultivating Experiences: Elevating BC Wine Tourism, in partnership with Wine Growers BC, PacifiCan and The Firecircle. The program supports B.C. wineries develop and deliver new or enhanced wine tourism visitor experiences to support new revenue generation.

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Additionally, in September 2023, the Ministry of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport provided Destination BC with $1.2 million to support a dedicated wildfire recovery campaign for wildfire-impacted regions. The wine tourism experience was prominently highlighted in this campaign through creative tactics including TV, video, digital ads, stories, and social media (paid and organic).

Inter-provincial trade

We share your concerns about the recent notice that B.C. wineries must cease shipping to consumers in Alberta or have their products pulled from retail shelves. This change has the potential to negatively impact B.C. wineries and their consumers in the Alberta market during an especially challenging time. Our wine industry is facing the potential of two successive crop failures and needs a collaborative approach from our provincial governments.

The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General recently met with the Honourable Dale Nally, Minister of Service Alberta and Red Tape Reduction, in hopes of finding a timely resolution to this matter. Ministry staff will continue to try to find a mutually-beneficial solution.

We and our colleagues will continue to meet with representatives of B.C.'s wine and grape growing industry to chart a path forward together. We look forward to our continued partnerships and to identifying short- and medium-term solutions to support the sector.

Thank you again for taking the time to share your concerns.

Sincerely,

Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
and Deputy Premier

Lana Popham
Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport

pc: The Honourable Pam Alexis, Minister of Agriculture and Food
The Honourable Brenda Bailey, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
Dan Ashton, MLA
Richard Cannings, MP

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

July 29, 2024

To: The Honourable Mike Farnworth
B.C. Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Cc: Dr. Roly Russell, MLA for Boundary-Similkameen

Re: Letter of Appreciation for Allowing Use of Out-of-Province Grapes for B.C. Wineries

Dear Minister Farnworth,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, we are writing to extend our heartfelt gratitude for the provincial government's recent decision to allow B.C. wineries to use out-of-province grapes to help mitigate the challenges faced by our wine industry. This initiative is especially timely given the significant losses experienced due to the cold snap this past January and what is needed to substitute the lack of a 2024 locally grown vintage.

This regulatory adjustment is a welcome and crucial step towards ensuring the sustainability and resilience of our local wineries, an industry that is very important to all of us in the South Okanagan and beyond. By permitting the use of out-of-province grapes without additional fees, you have provided much-needed relief that will help our wineries maintain production, retain skilled jobs, and continue contributing significantly to our local and provincial economy.

We must also thank you again for the relaxation of the minimum 4,500 minimum production requirement and improved flexibility for tastings on one's property. These changes have brought some much-needed relief to our winery owners and operators, enabling them to continue operations and revenue streams so they can focus on future recovery.

We also acknowledge the collaborative effort with Boundary-Similkameen MLA Roly Russell and thank him for the efforts he has made in protecting and promoting B.C.'s wine and agri-tourism industries.

Once again, thank you for your leadership and swift action in addressing the needs of our wineries.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

May 20, 2026

To: The Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture and Food
PO Box 9043 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Sent via email: AF.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: REQUEST FOR FAIR APPLICATION AND CLARIFICATION OF THE VINTAGE REPLACEMENT PROGRAM SUPPORT CAP

Dear Minister Popham,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, we are writing to express significant concern regarding the implementation and interpretation of the Province's Vintage Replacement Program and associated annual support cap administered through the BC Liquor Distribution Branch (BCLDB).

The Chamber would first like to acknowledge and thank the Province for recognizing the unprecedented challenges faced by British Columbia's wine industry following the devastating cold events that resulted in catastrophic crop losses across the Okanagan and other wine regions. The introduction of temporary relief measures allowing land-based wineries to utilize out-of-province grapes and grape juice was an important and necessary step in helping preserve jobs, maintain tourism activity, support agricultural businesses, and sustain one of British Columbia's most important value-added industries.

However, serious concerns have now emerged regarding the practical application of the annual support cap tied to a winery's "Olympic average" production volumes.

When the relief program was initially announced, the public understanding was that wineries would be permitted to temporarily utilize replacement grapes and grape juice to maintain production and market presence during an extraordinary agricultural crisis. Government communications emphasized the importance of helping wineries survive the crop failure, preserve employment, and continue supporting the provincial economy and tourism sector.

Subsequent guidance issued by the BCLDB, however, appears to materially expand the scope of the cap beyond replacement wine volumes alone. Specifically, current interpretations indicate that the annual support cap may now apply to the combined total sales or production volumes of Replacement Wine, BC VQA wine, and 100% British Columbia wine. As a result, wineries that exceeded their historical Olympic average due to legitimate business growth, prior vintage releases, increased consumer demand for BC wine, tourism recovery, or successful sales of BC-grown wines may now be facing significant financial penalties or increased taxation.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

From the Chamber's perspective, this represents a substantial departure from the original intent and practical understanding of the relief program.

Many wineries made operational, staffing, production, and contractual decisions in good faith based on the Province's commitment to support the industry through an extraordinary crisis. If BC-grown wines are now being included within the same support cap calculations as replacement wine utilizing imported inputs, then the program is no longer simply limiting temporary relief measures — it is effectively penalizing wineries for successfully selling legitimate British Columbia wine during a recovery period.

This outcome is particularly concerning for land-based wineries that:

- Continued producing and selling BC VQA wines from existing inventories or prior vintages;
- Experienced increased consumer demand for BC wines;
- Expanded direct-to-consumer sales channels;
- Retained employees and tourism operations despite extraordinary hardship;
- Took reasonable business steps to remain financially viable during the crop crisis.

The Chamber believes this creates an unintended and inequitable result that undermines the Province's original objective of stabilizing and protecting the BC wine sector.

The wine industry is a foundational component of the South Okanagan economy. Beyond agriculture itself, wineries support tourism, hospitality, restaurants, transportation providers, manufacturing, retail businesses, trades, and countless local jobs. Policies that unintentionally penalize growth or recovery within this sector risk broader economic consequences for communities throughout the region.

Accordingly, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce respectfully requests that the Province and the BCLDB:

1. Exclude BC VQA and 100% BC-grown wines from the replacement wine support-cap calculations where those wines were produced from BC grapes and are unrelated to replacement wine production.
2. Establish a transparent appeal or variance process for wineries that exceeded their Olympic average due to legitimate market demand, tourism recovery, release of prior vintages, or growth in sales unrelated to imported grapes or grape juice.
3. Honour the original intent and publicly communicated purpose of the program by ensuring wineries that acted in good faith based on the initial framework are not subjected to unexpected financial penalties or retroactive disadvantage.
4. Apply support-cap restrictions only to the portion of production directly attributable to imported grapes, grape juice, or replacement wine production.
5. Extend the replacement wine sales and support window beyond the current March 31, 2028 expiry date to at least March 31, 2030.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

We believe an extension of the support window is both reasonable and necessary given the extraordinary circumstances that continue to impact British Columbia's wine industry. Public statements from government and industry organizations continue to acknowledge that the sector remains significantly below pre-freeze production levels and that full vineyard recovery will take many years.

The Chamber fully supports accountability and recognizes the importance of ensuring temporary relief measures are administered fairly, transparently, and responsibly. However, the Chamber is of the position that government programs introduced during extraordinary emergencies must remain consistent with their original purpose, public messaging, and practical understanding at the time wineries made critical business decisions. British Columbia's land-based wineries should not be penalized for successfully selling BC-grown wine, supporting local employment, sustaining tourism activity, and maintaining economic stability during one of the most difficult periods the industry has ever faced.

We appreciate your consideration of this matter and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these concerns further.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Nina Krieger, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs and Economic Growth
The Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
The Honourable Brenda Bailey, Minister of Finance
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the Legislative Assembly Penticton-Summerland
BC Liquor Distribution Branch
Wine Growers British Columbia
Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association
Destination BC

Responsible Aggregate Development and the Protection of Garnet Valley

Issue

Aggregate resources are essential to supporting housing construction, public infrastructure, transportation projects, and economic development throughout British Columbia. However, aggregate extraction must be carefully planned to ensure industrial land uses are compatible with surrounding environmental, agricultural, tourism, cultural, and residential values.

Garnet Valley represents one of the South Okanagan's most significant rural landscapes. The area supports a diverse network of vineyards, orchards, agritourism businesses, equestrian operations, recreational trails, conservation lands, and small businesses that collectively contribute to the region's long-term economic prosperity and international reputation as a premier tourism destination.

The Chamber recognizes that decisions regarding resource development must carefully balance economic opportunity with environmental stewardship, Indigenous rights, long-term community prosperity, and sustainable land use.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports responsible aggregate development where it is compatible with surrounding land uses and does not compromise established industries, environmentally sensitive areas, Indigenous interests, or the long-term economic sustainability of the region.

The Chamber opposes the proposed Garnet Valley Gravel Mine because it believes the location is fundamentally incompatible with the area's existing agricultural, tourism, recreational, environmental, and cultural values.

The Chamber believes that long-term economic prosperity is best achieved by protecting the industries and natural assets that have established Garnet Valley as an important contributor to the South Okanagan economy.

The Chamber further supports land-use decisions that prioritize sustainable economic development, respect Indigenous stewardship and rights, incorporate sound scientific evidence, and reflect meaningful community consultation.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- locating aggregate extraction and other industrial resource developments where they are compatible with surrounding land uses and existing economic activities;
- protecting agricultural lands, agritourism businesses, recreation assets, environmentally sensitive ecosystems, and tourism destinations from incompatible industrial development;
- comprehensive land-use planning that balances resource development with the long-term economic interests of local communities;
- decision-making that gives appropriate weight to independent scientific evidence, environmental assessments, and ecological expertise;
- meaningful consultation with local governments, Indigenous governments, affected businesses, residents, and community organizations before approving major resource developments;
- permitting processes that are transparent, evidence-based, and clearly demonstrate how environmental, economic, social, and Indigenous considerations have been evaluated;
- respecting Indigenous rights, stewardship, and reconciliation commitments when considering development proposals affecting culturally and environmentally significant areas;

- regular review of permitting processes to ensure environmental science and technical expertise are fully considered during decision-making;
- prioritizing sustainable economic development that creates long-term employment and investment while protecting the natural assets that support tourism, agriculture, recreation, and quality of life; and
- denying industrial development proposals where the long-term environmental, cultural, social, and economic costs outweigh the anticipated public benefits.

Intended Outcome

Land-use decisions that support long-term community prosperity by protecting environmentally sensitive areas, respecting Indigenous rights and stewardship, preserving the South Okanagan's internationally recognized tourism and agricultural economy, and ensuring industrial resource development occurs only where it is environmentally responsible, economically justified, and compatible with surrounding land uses.

Status: Active

September 10, 2024

To: The Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation
Cc: The Honourable George Heyman, Minister of Environment and Climate
The Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
The Honourable Anne Kang, Minister of Municipal Affairs
Chief Greg Gabriel, Penticton Indian Band
His Worship Doug Holmes, Mayor of Summerland

Re: Objection to the Approval of the Garnet Valley Gravel Mining Operation

Dear Minister Osborne,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce respectfully adds its voice to the objections raised by the District of Summerland, the Penticton Indian Band, and the Summerland Chamber of Commerce regarding the approval of a gravel mining operation in Garnet Valley. The decision to approve this aggregate mine at 27600 Garnet Valley Road is concerning, given the cultural, environmental, and economic significance of the area, and the history of failed development attempts by the landowner over the past six years. It is difficult to understand why the Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation would disregard the strong opposition of two local governments and key stakeholders.

The Penticton Indian Band, as part of the syilx Nation, has clearly expressed that this area holds deep cultural and historical value. Chief Greg Gabriel and PIB Natural Resource Department Director James Pepper have emphasized that the proposed mining operation would severely impact syilx Title, Rights, interests, and the economy. Garnet Valley has been essential to the syilx people for generations, serving as a vital area for food, social, and ceremonial activities. Additionally, the valley provides critical habitat for species at risk, and the gravel pit proposal directly contradicts the PIB's ongoing restoration and conservation efforts in this region.

The District of Summerland has raised serious concerns about the environmental risks, traffic, geotechnical stability, and potential landslides, all of which would affect existing district infrastructure. The roadways in Garnet Valley were never designed to handle the heavy transport of aggregate materials, posing a threat to both the roads themselves and the underground infrastructure. Furthermore, the mine would disrupt important winter and spring feeding habitats for already vulnerable species, negating years of conservation work in the area.

From an economic and business perspective, the impact of this decision would be significant. Garnet Valley is a picturesque, tranquil area that supports a variety of businesses, including orchards, vineyards, agritourism accommodations, and horse stables. The valley is also an essential connection point for the Trail of the Okanagans, a world-class hiking and biking project that has the potential to attract international tourism. At a time when tourism and agribusiness are crucial to the region's economic recovery, introducing another gravel mine—especially when Summerland is already served by two existing gravel providers—would undermine local investments and damage the livelihoods of small business owners.

A gravel mine in such an environmentally and culturally sensitive area is neither necessary nor welcome. This decision calls into question the provincial government's commitment to reconciliation, environmental stewardship, and collaboration with local governments. The interconnectedness of the South Okanagan's communities and ecosystems underscores the far-reaching implications of this project. For these reasons, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce firmly opposes the approval of the gravel mine at 27600 Garnet Valley Road and urges the Honourable Minister Josie Osborne to reverse this permit.

We appreciate your attention to this matter and trust that you will give due consideration to the concerns raised by the local governments and communities impacted by this decision.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

REF: 121413

Good Afternoon,

I am writing in response to the letter you submitted to the Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Low Carbon Innovation (EMLI) regarding the Garnet Valley Gravel Pit Application. I acknowledge the concerns that you have expressed, and I have outlined below the process that the independent Statutory Decision Maker followed in evaluating the application.

The application went through a technical review by the permitting inspector and geotechnical specialists from EMLI. The application was also reviewed by the Ecosystems branch of the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. The application was also referred to the Regional District of Okanagan-Similkameen and the District of Summerland. A public comment period was held from December 21, 2023, until February 12th, 2024, and consultation with 22 Indigenous Nations was conducted.

The comments submitted by all agencies, Indigenous Nations, and the public were considered by the Statutory Decision Maker and mitigations were developed and added into permit conditions. Some of the key conditions that have been included into the legally enforceable permit are as follows:

- Development of a geotechnical monitoring plan by a Qualified Professional.
- Completion of an environmental assessment plan focused on plants and animals by a Qualified Professional.
- Completion of an archaeological assessment.
- Implementation of the Water Management, Erosion and Sediment Control Plan as part of the permit.
- Implementation of the Dust and Noise Plan as part of the permit.
- Limitation of the amount of disturbance allowable in the gravel pit at any given time (6 hectares); and,
- Limitations to the hours and days the pit may operate (7AM to 5PM Monday to Friday only and no work on statutory holidays).

With respect to road safety, it is anticipated that the volume of gravel trucks will be relatively small, with a maximum of 10 trucks/day (without a trailer), due to the limited size of the gravel pit operation.

EMLI's permitting inspectors are qualified technical specialists who are appointed and delegated to make independent statutory decisions on *Mines Act* applications without political interference. Although I acknowledge your disappointment with this decision, I believe that a comprehensive adjudication process took place.

If you have further questions about the permitting process or this file, please contact Mike Cloet, Regional Director at Mike.Cloet@gov.bc.ca.

Regards,

Responsible Mining and Competitiveness Division

Assistant Deputy Minister's Office

Ministry of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

June 9, 2025

To: The Honourable Jagrup Brar
Minister of Mining and Critical Minerals
PO Box 9848 Stn. Prov. Gov't.
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9T6
Email: MCM.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: Renewed Objection to the Approval of the Garnet Valley Gravel Mining Operation

Dear Minister Brar et al,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce is taking this opportunity to respectfully renew and strengthen our formal opposition to the provincially approved gravel mine at 27600 Garnet Valley Road, in light of newly released information obtained through a Freedom of Information request.

This new documentation—obtained by the Garnet Valley Tourism Association—reveals that the Ministry of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship's own biologist explicitly recommended against authorizing this mine, citing significant and likely irreversible harm to multiple species at risk and critical ecosystems. This includes habitat for the Western rattlesnake, Great Basin gopher snake, Great Basin spadefoot, Western tiger salamander, and Lewis's woodpecker, as well as a high-value mule deer winter range. These findings confirm what many stakeholders—including the Penticton Indian Band, Lower Similkameen Indian Band, District of Summerland, and our Chamber—have long expressed: that this site is entirely inappropriate for industrial activity.

Biologist Robert Stewart's unequivocal assessment that "negative impacts on ecosystems and species at risk are likely to be permanent or long-term and irreversible regardless of the level of mitigation attempted" should have precluded any further consideration of this project. That the mine was approved despite this expert warning raises serious questions about the integrity of the review process and the weight given to environmental science, Indigenous rights, and community input.

As previously stated in our original letter dated July 2024, the proposed mine threatens not only sensitive ecological and cultural values but also the economic fabric of the Garnet Valley. The region is home to a thriving mix of small farms, agritourism accommodations, vineyards, and recreation businesses. It forms a vital link in the Trail of the Okanagans and is a cornerstone of the District's tourism and rural charm. These long-standing, sustainable industries—aligned with provincial economic and climate priorities—stand to be irrevocably harmed by an extractive industrial operation that has no local support and no compelling necessity, given the presence of two existing gravel operations in the area.

We echo the calls by the District of Summerland and the Garnet Valley Tourism Association for this decision to be reversed and for the provincial government to acknowledge the overwhelming and well-documented evidence of this mine's unsuitability. We also support the District's request that this land—located within a sensitive ecological zone and municipal boundaries—be protected from further development of this nature, and urge the province to give serious consideration to its return to the stewardship of the snpink'tn (Penticton Indian Band).

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

This issue has become a lightning rod for growing frustration around perceived government indifference to community concerns, environmental stewardship, and reconciliation commitments. As a Chamber, we advocate for responsible development that reflects the values of local communities, supports long-term prosperity, and respects Indigenous rights and ecological boundaries. This mine does none of those things.

We therefore respectfully request the following:

1. That the gravel mine permit at 27600 Garnet Valley Road be revoked;
2. That the province conduct a public, independent review of the approval process for this permit;
3. That stronger inter-ministerial protocols be implemented to ensure scientific and ecological expertise are not overridden without clear and compelling justification;
4. That all future permitting processes reflect a more transparent, community- and Indigenous-led approach in sensitive regions, even when Bill 15, the Infrastructure Projects Act, is invoked.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and urge you to take immediate steps to rectify this erroneous decision before irreversible damage is done.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia
The Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
The Honourable Christine Boyle, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
The Honourable Tamara Davidson, Minister of Environment and Parks
The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of (Housing and) Municipal Affairs
The Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
John Rustad, Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the Legislative Assembly Penticton-Summerland
Jeremy Valeriote, Interim Leader of the B.C. Green Party
yilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn Indian Band
His Worship Doug Holmes, Mayor of Summerland

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

May 11th, 2026

To: The Honourable Jagrup Brar, Minister of Mining and Critical Minerals
Ms. Nicole Jones, P.Eng, Senior Inspector of Mines - Permitting

Sent via email: MCM.Minister@gov.bc.ca
Nicole.X.Jones@gov.bc.ca

Re: Objection to Garnet Valley Gravel Mine Permit Reapplication – 27600 Garnet Valley Road

Dear Minister Brar and Ms. Jones,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, we are writing to formally object to the reapplication of the gravel mining permit for the proposed operation at 27600 Garnet Valley Road.

This submission builds upon our previous correspondence and sustained advocacy opposing this project, including our earlier letters outlining significant environmental, economic, and community concerns. While the current process invites renewed public input, the core issues that led to our original opposition remain unresolved and, in several respects, have been further reinforced.

Garnet Valley is a uniquely sensitive and valuable area that supports a thriving network of small businesses, including vineyards, orchards, agritourism accommodations, and equestrian operations. It is also an important link in the Okanagan trail network and contributes meaningfully to the region's growing reputation as a destination for sustainable tourism and outdoor recreation. Introducing an industrial aggregate operation into this environment would be fundamentally incompatible with these uses and would undermine long-standing economic activity that is both sustainable and aligned with provincial priorities.

From a Chamber perspective, the economic implications of this proposal are particularly concerning. Garnet Valley represents an emerging economic hub rooted in agriculture, tourism, and experiential business. These sectors provide stable, long-term value, support local employment, and encourage investment in the region. A gravel mine, by contrast, represents a short-term extractive use that risks devaluing existing businesses, discouraging future investment, and eroding the very qualities that make the area economically viable. As we noted in our previous correspondence, the introduction of another gravel operation, especially in an area already served by existing providers—does not present a compelling or necessary economic case.

Equally concerning is the continued lack of local support for this project. The proposal has faced consistent and well-documented opposition from the District of Summerland, the snpink'tn (Penticton) Indian Band, local businesses, and residents. Proceeding with the reapplication despite this opposition raises serious concerns about the extent to which local government input, Indigenous rights and interests, and community-based economic considerations are being meaningfully incorporated into the decision-making process.

The environmental and cultural sensitivity of Garnet Valley has also been clearly established. The area provides important habitat for species at risk and supports ongoing conservation and restoration efforts. In addition, its significance to the syilx people has been repeatedly and clearly articulated by the snpink'tn Indian Band. As we have previously stated, development of this nature is incompatible with both ecological stewardship and the Province's stated commitments to reconciliation.

While we recognize that this reapplication process provides an opportunity for renewed review, it does not appear to meaningfully address the fundamental concerns that led to the original opposition. Without substantive changes that eliminate environmental risk, protect existing businesses, respect Indigenous interests, and demonstrate a clear and necessary economic benefit, this proposal remains unsuitable for this location.

For these reasons, the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce respectfully urges the Province to deny the reapplication for the gravel mining permit at 27600 Garnet Valley Road. We further encourage the Province to ensure that future decisions fully incorporate local government input, Indigenous stewardship and rights, and the long-term economic interests of the region, and to prioritize land use decisions that support sustainable development and community prosperity.

The Chamber remains committed to advocating for responsible development that reflects the values and priorities of the communities we serve. This proposal does not meet that standard, and we urge the Province to take this opportunity to align its decision-making accordingly.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
The Honourable Tamara Davidson, Minister of Environment and Parks
The Honourable Ravi Parmar, Minister of Forests
The Honourable Spencer Chandra Herbert, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs and Economic Growth
The Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the Legislative Assembly Penticton-Summerland
ẏilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn Indian Band
His Worship Doug Holmes, Mayor of Summerland

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

August 5, 2026

To: Nicole Jones, P.Eng.
Senior Inspector of Mines – Permitting
Ministry of Mining and Critical Minerals

Sent via email: MMD-Kamloops@gov.bc.ca

Re: Opposition to the Proposed Garnet Valley Gravel Mine

Dear Ms. Jones,

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce would like to take this opportunity to once again reiterate our strong opposition to the proposed Garnet Valley Gravel Mine and respectfully request that the application be denied.

The Chamber previously opposed this proposal because of its potential impacts on tourism, agriculture, transportation infrastructure, environmental values, and the long-term economic prosperity of the South Okanagan. Those concerns remain today.

We appreciate the Province's decision to reopen public consultation following the B.C. Supreme Court's decision to set aside the original permit approval. The Court identified significant shortcomings in the original review, including concerns related to ecological impacts, regional land-use planning, and geotechnical risk. We encourage the Province to ensure these issues are fully addressed before any decision is made.

The Chamber is not opposed to aggregate extraction. Construction materials are essential to supporting housing, infrastructure, and economic growth throughout British Columbia. However, aggregate operations should be located where they are compatible with surrounding land uses and do not compromise established economic drivers. In our view, this proposal does not strike that balance.

The South Okanagan's economy is built on a diverse mix of industries, with tourism and agriculture serving as two of its strongest economic pillars. Garnet Valley has become known for its natural beauty, agricultural character, outdoor recreation, and growing tourism appeal. Introducing a large industrial gravel operation into this landscape risks undermining the very qualities that attract visitors, support local businesses, and encourage investment throughout the region.

We also note that this proposal continues to face significant opposition from the District of Summerland, snpink'tn (Penticton Indian Band), local residents, and regional stakeholders. When a project remains fundamentally at odds with a community's long-term vision after years of review, that should weigh heavily in the Province's decision-making.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

The Chamber supports economic development that creates lasting prosperity while respecting existing industries and community values. In this case, we believe the long-term economic benefits generated by tourism, agriculture, recreation, and the region's quality of life far outweigh the benefits of locating this aggregate operation in Garnet Valley.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the Province deny the proposed Garnet Valley Road Pit application.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our comments.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Jagrup Brar, Minster of Mining and Critical Minerals
The Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities
The Honourable Tamara Davidson, Minister of Environment and Parks
The Honourable Ravi Parmar, Minister of Forests
The Honourable Spencer Chandra Herbert, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs and Economic Growth
The Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
Amelia Boultbee, MLA for Penticton-Summerland
ỷilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn (Penticton Indian Band)
Mayor Doug Holmes and Council, District of Summerland

Invasive Mussel Prevention

Issue

British Columbia's lakes and waterways are among the province's most valuable environmental, recreational, and economic assets. The Okanagan's freshwater ecosystem supports tourism, agriculture, municipal water supplies, hydroelectric generation, recreation, fisheries, Indigenous cultural values, and the region's internationally recognized wine industry.

The introduction of invasive zebra or quagga mussels would have devastating and irreversible consequences for British Columbia's freshwater ecosystems and economy. Once established, invasive mussels are virtually impossible to eradicate and can significantly increase infrastructure costs, disrupt irrigation systems, damage aquatic ecosystems, reduce recreational opportunities, diminish tourism, and negatively affect communities that rely on healthy lakes and rivers.

The Chamber believes that preventing the introduction of invasive mussels is substantially more effective and cost-efficient than attempting to manage or mitigate an established infestation.

Chamber Position

The Chamber supports a comprehensive, prevention-focused aquatic invasive species strategy that protects British Columbia's lakes and waterways through mandatory inspections, enhanced border screening, sustained government investment, regional collaboration, and science-based policy.

The Chamber believes preventing invasive mussels is both an environmental responsibility and an economic necessity, and supports proactive investments that safeguard tourism, agriculture, municipal infrastructure, businesses, and the quality of life enjoyed throughout the South Okanagan.

Recommendations

The Chamber supports:

- sustained and increased provincial funding for British Columbia's Invasive Mussel Defence Program to expand inspection capacity, staffing, enforcement, and public education;
- mandatory inspections of all watercraft entering British Columbia from outside the province, supported by appropriate legislative authority and enforcement mechanisms;
- strengthening provincial legislation to improve compliance with watercraft inspection requirements and establish penalties that effectively deter non-compliance;
- enhanced federal investment in aquatic invasive species prevention programs, with an emphasis on border protection, early interception, and prevention rather than post-introduction response;
- collaboration among British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Indigenous governments, federal agencies, and other jurisdictions to establish coordinated western Canadian aquatic invasive species prevention strategies;
- science-based risk assessments and precautionary measures, including temporary restrictions on high-risk watercraft movements where credible evidence indicates an elevated threat of invasive mussel introduction;
- policies that prioritize prevention over chemical eradication methods, recognizing the limited effectiveness and potential ecological impacts of chemical treatments once infestations become established;
- continued investment in public education programs promoting the "Clean, Drain, Dry" principles and other best practices for preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species;

- ongoing monitoring, research, and early detection initiatives that improve British Columbia's preparedness and response capabilities; and
- regular consultation with local governments, Indigenous communities, watershed organizations, tourism operators, agricultural producers, marinas, chambers of commerce, and other stakeholders when developing provincial aquatic invasive species policies.

Intended Outcome

A comprehensive, coordinated, and adequately funded aquatic biosecurity system that prevents the introduction of invasive mussels into British Columbia, protects the ecological integrity of the province's lakes and rivers, safeguards critical infrastructure and water supplies, and preserves the long-term economic prosperity of tourism, agriculture, recreation, and waterfront communities throughout the South Okanagan.

Status: Active

Media Coverage:

https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-96-radio-west/clip/16042325-business-groups-across-southern-interior-call-moritorium-out-of-provine

https://www.castanet.net/news/Kelowna/472192/Kelowna-Chamber-wants-moratorium-on-out-of-province-boats-entering-B.C.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

November 7, 2023

To: Anna Warwick Sears, Ph.D – Executive Director,
Okanagan Basin Water Board

Re: Call for Immediate Action to Prevent Invasive Mussel Introduction to B.C.

The Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce supports the Okanagan Basin Water Board in their request to introduce a temporary moratorium on out-of-province watercraft entering British Columbia until April 30, 2024, in order to provide time to learn the effectiveness of treatments applied to Snake River, a tributary of the Columbia River in Idaho, where invasive quagga mussels were identified.

The ecological and economic impact of invasive quagga or zebra mussels have proven to be catastrophic in those communities where they have taken hold, and we appreciate the work and advocacy the Okanagan Basin Water Board is doing to protect our lakes and river systems.

Sincerely,

Nicole Clark
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Kelowna Chamber

Growing the people who power the Okanagan.

February 13, 2024

The Hon. Pablo Rodriguez, Minister of Transport, Canada pablo.rodriguez@parl.gc.ca
The Hon. Nathan Cullen, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, B.C.
WLRS.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Mr. Rodriguez and Mr. Cullen:

Chambers of Commerce throughout the Thompson Okanagan today express concern around the threat of invasive mussels to our freshwater lakes and river system in British Columbia. Together, we call for an immediate temporary moratorium on out-of-province watercraft to prevent the introduction of invasive mussels into B.C. In doing so, we join the Okanagan Basin Water Board and some of our tourism associations.

We have learned that the federal government may be cutting funds to the mussel inspection program in B.C. Invasive mussels were verified in 2023 in Idaho, an 11-hour drive from B.C.'s borders. While B.C. provincial staff and Conservation Officers do good work through the Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP), serious gaps remain. Only a complete moratorium prior to establishing and maintaining round-the-clock monitoring will protect the fresh waters of our still mussel-free province from this invasive scourge.

The IMDP budget has been severely cut in recent years, representing a significant risk to much of the province, including the Thompson Okanagan.

Between May and December 2023, the IMDP intercepted 155 watercraft entering B.C. that were identified as high-risk for the mussels; 14 were confirmed to be carrying the mussels. At least a third of these were heading to the Okanagan-Thompson-Nicola.

We support the OBWB's following four requested actions to be taken by the Province of B.C.:

1. Introduce a temporary moratorium on out-of-province watercraft entering B.C.
2. Introduce "pull-the-plug" (on bilgewater) legislation to be in effect prior to the 2024 boating season
3. Ask Canada's Minister for Public Safety to issue direction for all watercraft entering Canada at all border crossings to be inspected prior to allowing entry.
4. Commit funding to the Invasive Mussel Defence Program of no less than $4 million per year

We further support four "fill the gaps" actions to follow those above:

1. Enhance funding to recruit and retain Invasive Mussel Defence Program staff to 2019 levels
2. Update the provincial Early Detection, Rapid Response plan

Kelowna Chamber of Commerce
544 Harvey Ave
Kelowna BC, V1Y 6C9
250 861 3627
hello@kelownachamber.org
kelownachamber.org

Growing the people who power the Okanagan.

3. Lead a planning process to create long-term response, containment, and control
4. Promote vulnerability assessments by utilities, local jurisdictions, and private entities

B.C.'s IMDP is currently under the jurisdiction of the B.C. Minister of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship.

The stunning natural beauty of Okanagan Lake provides a visual pleasure for the senses and a source of water to surrounding populations. Multiple freshwater bodies of water throughout the Thompson Okanagan from the border to the Shuswap require the protection of elected officials and residents. This is our obligation to the future.

We call on you both to take immediate action on the requests we are making today.

Dan Price, Chair
Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

Curtis Urlacher

Curtis Urlacher, President
Peachland Chamber of Commerce

Bryan Fitzpatrick, President
Greater Westside Board of Trade

Cathy Piva, President
Kamloops & District Chamber of Commerce

Nicole Clark, President
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Ryan Duffy, President
South Okanagan Chamber of Commerce

Kelowna Chamber of Commerce
544 Harvey Ave
Kelowna BC, V1Y 6C9

250 861 3627
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ACCREDITED CHAMBER OF COMMERCE 2023-2025 cc:

Government of Canada

Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions and Intergovernmental Affairs Dominic LeBlanc ps.ministerofpublicsafety-ministredelasecuritepublique.sp@ps-sp.gc.ca

Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard Diane Lebouthillier DFO.Minister-Ministre.MPO@dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Members of Parliament Dan Albas dan.albas@parl.gc.ca, Tracy Gray Tracy.Gray@parl.gc.ca, Richard Cannings richard.cannings@parl.gc.ca, Mel Arnold mel.arnold@parl.gc.ca

Province of B.C.

Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy George Heyman ENV.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Minister of Energy, Mines and Low Carbon Innovation Josie Osborne josie.osborne.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Aquaculture MLA Kelly Greene Kelly.Greene.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Parliamentary Secretary for Watershed Restoration MLA Fin Donnelly fin.donnelly.MLA@leg.bc.ca

MLAs Dan Ashton Dan.Ashton.MLA@leg.bc.ca, Ben Stewart Ben.Stewart.MLA@leg.bc.ca, Renee Merrifield Renee.Merrifield.MLA@leg.bc.ca, Norm Letnick Norm.Letnick.MLA@leg.bc.ca, Harwinder Sandhu harwinder.sandhu.MLA@leg.bc.ca, Greg Kyllo Greg.Kyllo.MLA@leg.bc.ca

Municipal Governments

Mayor Tom Dyas, Kelowna tdyas@kelowna.ca

Mayor Gord Milsom, West Kelowna gord.milsom@westkelownacity.ca

Mayor Victor Cumming, Vernon mayor@vernon.ca

Mayor Blair Ireland, Lake Country ireland@lakecountry.bc.ca

Mayor Julius Bloomfield, Penticton julius.bloomfield@penticton.ca

Mayor Doug Holmes, Summerland dholmes@summerland.ca

Mayor Patrick Van Minsel, Peachland mayorvanminsel@peachland.ca

Mayor Sue McKortoff, Osoyoos smckortoff@osoyoos.ca

Syilx Territory

Robert Louie, Chief, Westbank First Nation rlouie@wfn.ca

Regional Districts

Loyal Wooldridge, Chair, Central Okanagan Regional District lwooldridge@kelowna.ca

Barbara Roden, Chair, Thompson-Nicola Regional District, broden@ashcroftbc.ca

Okanagan-Similkameen Regional District, Mark Pendergraft, Chair info@rdos.bc.ca

North Okanagan Regional District, Shirley Fowler, Chair sfowler@cityofarmstrong.bc.ca

Lisanne Ballantyne, CEO, Tourism Kelowna lisanne@tourismkelowna.com

Ellen Walker-Matthews, CEO, Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association ceo@totabc.com

Derek Gratz, Chair, Kelowna Chamber Policy Advisory Committee; Associate Director, UBC University-Industry Liaison derek.gratz@ubc.ca

Anna Warwick Sears, Executive Director, Okanagan Basin Water Board anna.warwick.sears@obwb.ca

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country
Chamber of Commerce

Jordan Knox, President
Michael Magnusson, Executive Director
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

February 18, 2024

To: The Honourable Randene Neill
Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship
PO Box 9012 Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8M 9L6
Email: WLRS.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Re: Strengthening B.C.'s Invasive Mussel Defence Program – A Critical Investment in Economic and Environmental Sustainability

Dear Minister Neill,

On behalf of the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce, I am writing to urge the provincial government to take immediate action to strengthen the Invasive Mussel Defence Program (IMDP) and implement mandatory inspections for all watercraft entering British Columbia. This issue is of critical importance to our business community, the tourism industry, and the overall economic health of the Okanagan region.

As you are aware, invasive mussels pose a severe threat to B.C.'s freshwater ecosystems, infrastructure, and key economic sectors. Without adequate prevention measures, an infestation could result in devastating financial consequences, including:

- Infrastructure Damage: Mussels clog pipes and water intake systems, increasing maintenance costs for municipal water supplies, hydroelectric dams, and agricultural irrigation. Estimates suggest an infestation could cost B.C. hundreds of millions of dollars annually in damages and lost productivity.
- Tourism & Recreation Impacts: Okanagan Lake and other waterways attract thousands of visitors each year, contributing significantly to local businesses, hotels, and restaurants. If invasive mussels take hold, the impact on water quality, beach closures, and declining recreational opportunities could result in severe economic losses for businesses reliant on tourism.
- Agriculture & Wine Industry Risks: The Okanagan's agriculture sector, including our world-renowned wineries, depends on clean and sustainable water sources. Mussel infestations can disrupt irrigation systems, increase water treatment costs, and reduce the availability of high-quality water essential for production.
- Property Value Decline: Lakeside communities thrive on their pristine natural environment. If mussels spread, property values could plummet, directly affecting local economies and tax revenues.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Urgent Actions Required:

1. Immediate Funding for the IMDP – $5.5 Million Investment
The IMDP has been underfunded for years, and its effectiveness has been compromised by budget reductions and staffing shortages. The number of watercraft inspections has declined by 60% since 2019, despite an increasing threat from neighboring jurisdictions like Idaho. We urge the provincial government to allocate at least $5.5 million to the IMDP in 2025 to restore and expand inspections.

2. Mandatory Inspections for All Watercraft Entering B.C.
Unlike Alberta, which is introducing mandatory watercraft inspections in 2026, B.C. currently only inspects boats that pass an open station, leaving significant gaps in coverage. We recommend amending the Wildlife Act and Water Sustainability Act to require mandatory inspections for all incoming watercraft.

3. Federal Support for Prevention, Not Just Detection
Federal funding has been largely focused on mussel detection rather than prevention. As we have seen in Lake Winnipeg and are witnessing in Idaho's Snake River, once mussels are detected, the infestation and damage is irreversible. We urge you to advocate for federal funding that prioritizes early prevention and border screening programs, as well as a moratorium on out-of-country watercraft given that the copper-based chemical treatments in Idaho's Snake River were unsuccessful in eliminating quagga mussels but did kill between 6 and 7 tons of fish, including 48 white sturgeon.

4. A Western Canada Invasive Mussel-Free Zone
The province should collaborate with Alberta and Saskatchewan to establish a regional invasive mussel prevention strategy, including shared policies, inspection stations, and penalties. Aligning with Alberta's AIS Task Force recommendations will create a more effective defense against mussel contamination across Western Canada.

5. Aligning Penalties to Deter Non-Compliance
Currently, B.C.'s fines for non-compliance with inspection programs are far lower than Alberta's. We recommend increasing penalties to at least match Alberta's $4,200 fine for failing to stop at an inspection station and implementing higher fines for larger, high-risk watercraft.

6. Clear Policy to Limit Chemical Use in "Rapid Response" Strategies
While some jurisdictions propose chemical treatments as a last resort for invasive mussels like in the Snake River, history shows that these measures are often ineffective, costly, and harmful to other aquatic species, including salmon populations. The best strategy remains prevention through mandatory inspections and proactive funding.

The Chamber
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce

Public and Business Community Support

This issue is not just an environmental concern—it is an economic imperative. In March 2024, the Okanagan Basin Water Board (OBWB) convened a multi-stakeholder working group of over 100 representatives, including local governments, First Nations, marinas, tourism associations, and chambers of commerce. The overwhelming consensus was that B.C. must take stronger action now to protect our waters, economy, and way of life.

As the voice of the Penticton business community, we strongly encourage your government to prioritize these investments in the upcoming budget and include mandatory watercraft inspections in the Wildlife Act Review. The cost of inaction is far too great, and we stand ready to support efforts to ensure B.C. remains free from invasive mussels.

Thank you for your time and leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to your response and to seeing B.C. take decisive action to protect our waters and economy.

Sincerely,

Jordan Knox,
President

Michael Magnusson,
Executive Director

Cc: The Honourable Tamara Davidson, Minister of Environment and Parks
The Honourable Lana Popham, Minister of Agriculture and Food
The Honourable Bowinn Ma, Minister of Infrastructure
The Honourable Diana Gibson, Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Innovation
The Honourable Spencer Chandra Herbert, Minister of Tourism, Arts, Culture and Sport
Amelia Boultbee, Member of the Legislative Assembly Penticton-Summerland
Julius Bloomfield, Mayor of Penticton
y̓ilmixʷm (Chief) Greg Gabriel, snpink'tn (Penticton) Indian Band
Richard Cannings, Member of Parliament South Okanagan - West Kootenay

Access to Safe Drinking Water to Protect Business Stability

Issue
Reliable access to safe drinking water is foundational economic infrastructure. Business operations, investment attraction, workforce retention, and regional competitiveness all depend on stable and predictable water systems. In many parts of British Columbia, particularly in small, rural, and remote communities, water infrastructure instability is creating direct economic risk. Businesses face rising operating costs, service disruptions, and reduced consumer spending, while communities struggle to attract and retain investment.

Background
Water infrastructure across British Columbia is facing increasing strain due to aging systems, deferred maintenance, regulatory requirements, population growth, and climate-related pressures. While water system delivery is often locally administered, provincial regulations, standards, and funding frameworks significantly influence the cost and sustainability of these systems., with the economic consequences of infrastructure failure extending far beyond local governments. In many cases, limited local tax bases and governance structures make it difficult to finance major upgrades without significant external support, raising important questions about the appropriate role of the provincial governments.

These challenges are most acute in small, rural, and regionally governed systems, where limited tax bases and dispersed populations make it difficult to absorb capital costs while maintaining economic competitiveness.

In the South Okanagan, residents connected to the Sage Mesa Water System near Penticton are facing a potential $33 million replacement cost without government assistance, equating to an approximately $136,000 levy per property owner[16]. Public reporting indicates infrastructure concerns were identified years ago, yet residents are now being asked to authorize borrowing that could result in significant monthly financial burdens[17]. Some homeowners have described the potential outcome as "economic eviction."[18]

Such financial shocks have broader economic consequences:

- Reduced household disposable income directly impacts local retail, hospitality, and service sectors.
- Elevated utility costs increase operating expenses for small businesses.
- Property value instability discourages commercial investment.
- Housing affordability challenges impair workforce attraction and retention.

<u>Water insecurity and operational risk:</u>
The Town of Osoyoos provides a second example of systemic vulnerability. The community relies on six groundwater wells feeding municipal reservoirs. During peak summer demand, even with all six wells operating at full capacity, reservoir levels have fallen to approximately 40 percent, leaving no contingency capacity in the event of mechanical failure. Municipal officials have warned that if reservoir levels fall below 35 percent, sediment disturbance could trigger a community-wide boil water advisory lasting weeks.[19]

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[16] Castanet, Water woes at Penticton community were highlighted years ago,
https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/596478/Water-woes-at-Penticton-community-were-highlighted-years-ago
[17] CBC News, Residents face referendum over $33M water system costs near Penticton,
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/penticton-water-b-c-residents-referendum-9.7067600
[18] Castanet, "Economic eviction" concerns raised over $33 million water system upgrade,
https://www.castanet.net/news/Penticton/566760/-Economic-eviction-Residents-concern-grows-with-33-million-cost-for-water-system-upgrade-near-Penticton
[19] Penticton Herald, Osoyoos warns of potential boil water orders amid critically low reservoir levels,
https://www.pentictonherald.ca/news/article_222debc0-2841-423f-af4f-bdd2f410079b.html

In the City of Prince Rupert, aging water infrastructure, including century-old pipes, has resulted in repeated boil water advisories[20], emergency conditions, and a multi-year infrastructure program exceeding $100 million [21]. As a critical trade gateway supporting billions in economic activity, these challenges highlight the broader provincial and national economic risks associated with water system instability.

Prolonged boil water advisories significantly disrupt:

- Restaurants, wineries, and food processors.
- Hotels and tourism operators, particularly during peak season.
- Health care facilities and long-term care operations.
- Construction activity requiring potable water access.

In addition, inadequate water capacity and low- or no-flow hydrants present serious risks for fire suppression, particularly during wildfire season. This creates heightened exposure for businesses through property damage, insurance costs, and potential interruption of operations.

Provincial regulatory requirements, including water quality and infrastructure standards, are essential for public safety but can create significant financial pressures for smaller systems when not paired with predictable, long-term funding.

<u>Provincial economic implications:</u>
These examples reflect broader provincial challenges. According to the BC Water & Waste Association, approximately $7.7 billion in water and wastewater infrastructure across British Columbia is currently in very poor condition and requires immediate attention.[22] When infrastructure reaches crisis level, capital costs are frequently downloaded onto small ratepayer bases ill-equipped to absorb them.

Unstable water systems create measurable economic impacts:

- Suppressed consumer spending.
- Increased cost of doing business.
- Delayed housing and commercial development.
- Reduced investor confidence.
- Heightened reputational risk for tourism-dependent regions.

Current funding programs are competitive and episodic, rather than predictable and system-based. Businesses require certainty in infrastructure planning to make long-term investment decisions, a principle recognized by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)[23], which identifies reliable and well-governed infrastructure as fundamental to maintaining investor confidence and economic competitiveness. Without reform, water infrastructure instability will increasingly act as a structural barrier to regional economic growth.

The Chamber Recommends
That the Provincial Government:

1. Establish a permanent, dedicated clean water infrastructure fund, coordinated with federal programs, prioritizing small, rural, regional, and private systems where capital replacement would otherwise create economic instability.
2. Develop a provincially led, economic-impact-based cost-sharing framework that clearly defines the roles of provincial, federal, regional, and local governments, while accounting for tax base capacity, median income levels, and impacts on business competitiveness.

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[20] https://waterportal.ca/water-news/prince-rupert-boil-water-notice-2025/
[21] https://www.canada.ca/en/housing-infrastructure-communities/news/2024/03/prince-rupert-receives-funding-to-help-upgrade-water-system-and-improve-sewer-line.html
[22] BC Water & Waste Association, Infrastructure Report Card and Financial Sustainability Overview, https://bcwwa.org/site/resources/infrastructurereport
[23] Recommendation of the Council on the Governance of Infrastructure, https://legalinstruments.oecd.org/en/instruments/OECD-LEGAL-0460/

3. Implement provincially coordinated early-warning monitoring and oversight mechanisms for vulnerable water systems to prevent crisis-driven capital downloads and ensure timely intervention.
4. Create an emergency stabilization mechanism to prevent sudden infrastructure costs from undermining local housing affordability, business stability, and local economies.
5. Develop and implement clear provincial standards and guidance for water system resilience, including minimum requirements for emergency capacity, fire flow, and long-term asset management planning.

Submitted by the Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce