

Begin forwarded message:

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**Subject:** Stop Performing, Start Leading: 100 Mile House Deserves Better

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Lorne Doerkson, MLA for Cariboo-Chilcotin

Mayor Maureen Pinkney, 100 Mile House Mayor

Councillor Donna Barnett, 100 Mile House Councillor

Councillor Jenni Guimond, 100 Mile House Councillor

Councillor Dave Mingo, 100 Mile House Councillor

Councillor Marty Norgren, 100 Mile House Councillor

Al Richmond, CRD Director for Area G,

Margo Wagner, CRD Director for Area H,

Eric De Vries, CRD Director for Area L,

and Todd Doherty, MP for Cariboo–Prince George,

I am writing today because I am tired of seeing performative outrage on Facebook from our elected officials while nothing meaningful is done to fix the problems plaguing 100 Mile House.

Posting about emergency room closures without making any real effort to build a community that doctors, nurses and young working families would want to move to is not leadership, it's theatre.

I have to wonder whether our MLA and MP are willing to let our community suffer simply because the BC NDP and federal Liberals currently hold government. If that isn't the case, then please prove it. Prove it by investing in our town and region.

This is not just about 100 Mile House. The surrounding areas of Area G, Area H and Area L all depend on 100 Mile House as their hub for healthcare, services, tourism and community life. When the town fails to thrive, the entire region suffers alongside it.

Right now, we watch restaurants open and shut their doors because they cannot fill their seats. This is not just about restaurants closing, a healthy restaurant scene is one of the clearest indicators of a strong local economy and a vibrant tourist economy. When restaurants thrive, it shows that locals have enough disposable income to dine out, tourists are visiting and spending money in town and the community is lively, social and growing. When restaurants are forced to close early or shut down altogether, it signals serious underlying problems. It shows that locals cannot afford to support dining out, that tourists are not coming and they aren't staying, that business owners do not have confidence to invest and that the town is stagnant or declining. In 100 Mile House, we see restaurants closing by 8 PM, even on weekends, even during peak tourist seasons and even long weekends. This is a flashing red warning light that our economy is dying.

Look at Birch Avenue, the heart of our town. On weekends, when it should be alive with people, music, patios, markets and community activity, it's closed and empty. Instead of

being a place where locals and tourists gather, shop and connect, it looks abandoned. That isn't normal and that isn't healthy. A thriving downtown is essential for tourism, small business survival and civic pride. The fact that our main street sits silent on evenings and weekends speaks volumes about how far we've fallen behind.

And it's not just restaurants, now we are losing banks.

BMO, one of Canada's largest financial institutions, is pulling out of 100 Mile House entirely. That is not a random decision, that is a major financial institution assessing our town and deciding that it's no longer worth the investment. This signals a serious erosion of confidence in the future of our community. Banks do not leave thriving towns.

Another major red flag is the kind of growth we are seeing. More and more industrial type businesses are opening, while the things that actually build community life are disappearing. Heavy industry might survive in a dying town, but it does nothing for tourists, young families, seniors, healthcare workers or youth. It does not contribute to third places, culture or livability. It does not help after school programming, quality of life or a vibrant downtown. When industrial expansion is the only visible growth while everything else fades away, that is not economic development, it's economic decay in disguise.

On top of that, we lack something every healthy, modern community needs: third places. These are the spaces outside of home (your first place) and work (your second place) where life actually happens; where people meet, relax, connect, create and feel like they belong. Good third places are casual, low cost or free, accessible, welcoming and open to everyone. They aren't about transactions, they're about connection. Most importantly, they need to be available when people are actually free; evenings, weekends, holidays and after school. That's when the majority of the community is off work, out of school or looking for somewhere to go.

Examples of third places include:

- Cafés and coffee shops open until 9 or 10PM for studying, socializing and community events
- Libraries with weekend and evenings hours and cozy seating for reading, workshops and public talks
- Community centre's offering Friday night teen drop ins, Saturday craft markets and Sunday family yoga as some examples
- Pubs or lounges that host trivia nights, live music or community game nights that are open until at least 10PM
- Parks with picnic zones, fire pits, shaded benches and pop-up activities on weekends
- Indoor recreation centre's with open gyms in the evenings, adult aquafit and senior walking clubs

- Public galleries open evenings and weekends
- Evening farmers markets, food truck festivals and car free street nights on Birch Avenue with markets, live music and food trucks
- A small downtown music stage/gazebo/public square for open mic nights or Friday night concerts
- After-school drop in programs for youth that run into the early evening
- Cozy indoor community lounges with games, music, Wi-Fi and space for people just to be

In 100 Mile House, almost all of these are missing. The few that exist are either closed early, inaccessible or underused. There are no warm, inviting spaces where you can go after work or school to meet people, feel inspired or just exist in community.

This hurts everyone.

It leaves seniors isolated, it gives youth nowhere to go but parking lots or parties, it pushes newcomers away and makes professionals feel like this isn't a place they can build a life. It limits tourism by giving people no reason to stop and stay and it strangles our ability to grow any kind of creative, cultural or economic energy.

What could we create in 100 Mile House?

We could start with a proper year round community centre, one that includes:

- Public meeting rooms and workshop spaces with weekend bookings
- Youth specific programming that runs after school and into the evening
- Lounge seating, public computers and free Wi-Fi for anyone
- An indoor walking track or wellness room for seniors to use all year
- A 24 hour warming and cooling space that doubles as a hub for support services

We could add more café style hangouts that stay open past 6 PM, a small public gallery with Thursday-Saturday evening hours. An open street night every weekend on Birch Avenue with music, performers and market vendors. A food truck park could run Friday to Sunday, supporting local chefs and artisans. The stage in Centennial Park could host free concerts during more evenings and on weekend days, theatre, or storytelling nights. We could have a Sunday brunch market with music and picnic seating. None of this is a fantasy, these are real things other towns are doing and they are thriving because of it.

But it only works if these spaces are open when people need them most: after work, after school, on evenings and weekends, when the community is actually looking for connection, activity and belonging. When people don't have third places, they isolate. They go straight home, they scroll, they disengage. When there are no places to connect,

they lose connection; to each other, to the town and to themselves. This isolation is especially hard on young people, seniors and newcomers. It leads to loneliness, anxiety, depression and hopelessness. Third places are not just about social life, they're about mental health, community safety and resilience. They are what turn a collection of buildings into a living, breathing community.

When you give people places to be, they show up and when you give them nothing, they leave.

Right now, the lack of third places, and the lack of access to them when it matters, is one of the biggest reasons people are choosing other towns and if we don't change that, we will keep losing the very people we need most.

To make things worse, even the most basic, widely supported improvements, like building an aquatic centre, receive pushback here. We aren't talking about a luxury, we're talking about critical infrastructure for physical health, mental health, senior wellness, youth development, swimming lessons and community connection. Aquatic centres are one of the few spaces that serve everyone, from toddlers to seniors, families to single adults, athletes to people with disabilities. Yet here in 100 Mile House, there is resistance. That kind of opposition tells professionals everything they need to know. If this town pushes back on something that important, why would they believe we're serious about anything bigger? That resistance is part of why we're being left behind. It's not just about what we fail to build, it's about the attitude that makes people not want to stay.

Meanwhile, industry businesses continue to operate, but they don't attract tourists, doctors, nurses, young families or the growth we desperately need.

To make matters even worse, our community has a well known reputation for racism, homophobia, transphobia and misogyny. Educated professionals notice this, they talk about it, it affects their decisions and it drives people away. If you are serious about attracting workers, families and professionals, then you must publicly and consistently denounce discrimination of all kinds. One statement is not enough. It must be loud, clear, proud and repeated over and over again.

We need:

- Construction of a full aquatic and recreation centre for all ages
- A revitalized Birch Avenue with patios, outdoor seating, events, beautification and vibrancy
- Regular festivals, markets, outdoor concerts and family friendly community gatherings in the evenings and weekends when families can participate together
- Public art, murals, cultural investment and thriving third places for residents and visitors alike
- Year round tourism promotion and development

-A welcoming, inclusive culture where discrimination is loudly and continuously condemned by leadership

All of this directly impacts mental health.

When people have nowhere to go after work, no public spaces to gather, no sense of culture, community or vibrancy, they disconnect. Social isolation increases, especially for seniors, young adults and newcomers. Boredom turns into depression and loneliness turns into anxiety. Without events, recreation and connection points, people become more stressed, more burnt out, and less likely to stay in the community. This includes healthcare workers. We cannot expect doctors, nurses and essential staff to work high pressure jobs and then live in towns that offer no meaningful way to rest, connect or feel joy.

A dying town breeds hopelessness and a thriving one supports mental health. That difference is life or death and it matters. All of this adds up to the same conclusion: 100 Mile House is not thriving, It's shrinking and it's dying. Healthcare workers don't want to live in or raise their families in a dying town. They are choosing vibrant places; places with life, music, culture, safety and belonging. They are choosing towns that invest in people, not just industry. If we want to compete, we need to stop pretending we're doing fine and start building a community that people actually want to be part of.

It shouldn't fall on everyday citizens to singlehandedly prop up this town. That responsibility belongs to elected officials and the various levels of government tasked with serving the public. It's your job to make this a place where people want to live, where youth have opportunities, where families can thrive, where seniors feel supported and where people of all identities and backgrounds feel safe and welcomed. We all pay taxes and we all live here. That means this town should reflect the needs and wellbeing of everyone; not just industry, not just legacy interests and not just the status quo. A thriving community is one built for people, and it is your responsibility to make sure that happens.

I look forward to hearing how each of you plans to address these concerns and what specific steps you are going to take to ensure 100 Mile House and the surrounding region become a place where people want to live, work and stay. This isn't just about words, it's about action

We are watching.

We are tired of empty gestures.

We expect real action.

We expect you to step up.

Please do something.

Sincerely,

Barb Patterson