

Loss of health care funding with sale of 12-bed White Rock facility leads to concerns over relocation of long-term residents

Mental health housing facility to close after 50 years

Sobia Moman
Staff reporter

A dozen residents of a White Rock mental health housing facility scheduled for closure next summer are on the cusp of losing not only their home, but their support system and community, too, says the facility's owner.

Buena Vista Lodge, which has offered live-in mental health treatment to people in White Rock for more than 50 years, through 12 beds funded by Fraser Health Authority, will close next June due to a lack of funding, according to its current owners.

On Oct. 5, Buena Vista Lodge received a letter from FHA, informing them of the decision, which came after the current owners decided

to sell the facility.

The budget for the mental health space had been steadily decreasing, the owners said, making it tough for them – one of whom has been at Buena Vista Lodge for more than 20 years – to continue.

“We can't afford to do this. For the last year, we've been putting in money out of my own pocket to support this group,” explained the owner, who when approached by *Peace Arch News* agreed to speak, but asked not to be identified.

The situation was not sustainable, so they decided to lease the building, and found a party they believe are the best candidates for the job — individuals who have experience in the field and

are “interested in working with the new budget.”

However, when they informed Fraser Health of the plan to switch operators and handed over a one-year notice, they were sent an email indicating that no more money would be forthcoming once the current contract had expired.

“You have been caring providers and have provided excellent service to clients at the site,” the letter reads.

“However, the process we have embarked upon for bed replacement has dedicated our resources to other projects. Please advise any potential leasers of the space that, at this time, we are not able to negotiate a MHSU (mental health and substance use) services contract with them.”

Staff members have informed residents of

Buena Vista Lodge of the health authority's decision.

“Some of them have been here 27, 28 years. The (newest) one we have here has been here probably 17 years. Like, everyone's been here forever. This is their home, this is their community,” the owner said.

Residents, who the facility's owners describe, as “family” have not reacted well to the news that they will have to relocate in a few months, they said.

“You want to pick them up and put them in a different community? I guarantee you, there's going to be some kind of loss (of life) at some point,” he said.

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Newly-elected Mayor Megan Knight calls for council to ‘restore decorum’

New White Rock city council sworn in for four-year term



After being sworn in as mayor of the City of White Rock, Megan Knight chats with Surrey-White Rock MLA Trevor Halford (left) and an unidentified person at the White Rock Community Centre Monday evening, Nov. 7, 2022. Knight defeated one-term mayor Darryl Walker as well as challengers Erika Johanson and Scott Kristjanson, in the Oct. 15 mayoral race. Also sworn in Monday night was the city's six-member council. Surrey's new city council was also sworn in on Monday. See story on Page A8. (Alex Browne photo)

Alex Browne
Staff reporter

A new era of White Rock politics began Monday (Nov. 7) as newly elected Mayor Megan Knight and six councillors took their oaths of office at a special ceremony at White Rock Community Centre.

Knight and councillors David Chesney, Elaine Cheung, Ernie Klassen, Bill Lawrence, Michele Partridge and Christopher Trevelyan were conducted into the hall by piper Kyle Banta and an honour guard of White Rock RCMP and Fire and Rescue members.

Then, following a traditional blessing by Semiahmoo First Nation councillor Joanne Charles, and the singing of O Canada, by Erin Kim, accompanied by pianist Regina He (both of the Semiahmoo Secondary music program), the new council was officially sworn in by Provincial Court Judge Edna Ritchie.

Ritchie quipped, to laughter from the capacity crowd of friends, supporters, community stalwarts, former mayors and dignitaries that the councillors – who repeated their oaths in unison – were more together at the end of the procedure than at the beginning.

“Hopefully that will continue,” she said.

But it was clear – and even remarked by Knight in her inaugural address – that White Rock voters have returned a highly diverse group of representatives for the next four years.

Knight, a notary public, and Lawrence, owner of the Sandpiper Liquor Store and former owner of the Sandpiper Pub, were both members of council in the 2014-18 term.

Veteran three-term councillor Chesney, and Cheung and Partridge have all been active in the performing arts and arts and community advocacy in general, while Trevelyan, returning for a second term, is a teacher at Earl Marriott Secondary, and Klassen, owner of florists Ashberry and Logan, is also president of White Rock Pride.

“Like the people in this city, this council represents a mixture of ideas and approaches,” Knight said in her address.

“This means we can do things differently and bring our collective experiences and ideas to the table.

“But regardless of the differences in approach or philosophy, we must proceed with respect and restore decorum at city hall, between each other and between council and staff.

“It's time to put away the division behind us and work together in the best interests of the people of this great city.”

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Petition started to halt closure

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“Should people end up on the streets because of this?... They’re here for a reason and this is not helping them... we are witnessing an increase in paranoia and anxiety (and) behavioural challenges.”

The largest concern lies with where Buena Vista Lodge residents will go.

In 2018, Good Shepherd Lodge, a similar White Rock facility, but with 30 beds — also funded through Fraser Health — was shut down. Fraser Health noted that in that situation, as well, it was the owners who “initiated its closure.”

With the closure of Good Shepherd Lodge, options for re-housing in South Surrey and White Rock are slim, Buena Vista’s owner said.

They reached out to Surrey-White Rock Liberal MLA Trevor Halford for support in their fight to keep their doors open. Halford addressed the issue in the legislature on Tuesday, Nov. 1.

“Why is this minister cutting beds in the middle of a mental health crisis?” Halford challenged Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Sheila Malcolmson.

“These are 12 beds that are leaving the community, without any explanation.”

“I welcome the member letting me know any details about the facility that he describes,”

Malcolmson replied.

Halford, in turn, called it a “problem” that the minister did not already know about Buena Vista Lodge.

“In every health authority, we have opened more addiction treatment and recovery beds, more mental health beds than there have ever been in the history of the province,” Malcolmson responded.

In a statement to PAN on Wednesday (Nov. 2), a representative from Fraser Health reiterated that the closure of Buena Vista Lodge was not the health authority’s decision.

“I can tell you that the owner of Buena Vista Lodge — a private facility — has notified Fraser Health that it intends to close the site. The owners indicated it decided to end its service agreements,” the representative said.

“Fraser Health met with the owner to discuss its concerns and potential mitigation strategies to prevent the closure. However, the owner was firm in its decision. We have been in ongoing conversations with the owner to ensure it is supported to the end of the notice term.”

In response to concerns about where the residents will go and how far they will have to move from their families, Fraser Health indicated that a plan is in place.

“Over the next year, Fraser Health will be working with all residents and their families

at the facility to ensure proper transition plans to new homes are in place and that residents continue to receive the supports and services they need. We are committed to reinvesting this funding into new bed-based mental health programs in our region and we work closely with our partners to identify optimal locations,” the representative continued.

“While Fraser Health does not have plans to close any mental health and substance use bed-based programs in our region, in instances where a contracted provider chooses to close a residence, we will work with the provider to ensure appropriate transition plans are in place for all residents and that they have continued access to the supports they need.”

A petition has been started to halt the closure of Buena Vista Lodge. So far, it has received nearly 300 signatures.

“Just show me that there’s a new facility being built in White Rock if there’s an issue with us... Most of their families live in the neighbourhood. There’s not a single person here who doesn’t get a visitation from their family on a weekly basis,” Buena Vista’s owner said.

By having their families close by, residents of Buena Vista Lodge have had their mental health improve over time. This situation threatens to unravel that progress, they said.

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