

June 15, 2026

L26-6842

To:

Honourable David Eby, Premier of British Columbia,
Honourable Niki Sharma, Attorney General and Deputy Premier,
Honourable Nina Kriegar, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General,
Honourable Randene Neill, Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship,
Honourable Tamara Davidson, Minister of Environment and Parks,
Honourable Ravi Parma, Minister of Forests,
Honourable Josie Osborne, Minister of Health,
Honourable Amna Shah, Parliamentary Secretary for Mental Health and Addictions,
Honourable Christine Boyle, Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs,
Honourable Brittny Anderson, Minister of State for Local Governments and Rural Communities,
Southern Interior Local Government Association

The Town of Princeton is formally calling upon the Province of British Columbia to take immediate and coordinated action to address the escalating homelessness, mental health, substance-use, public safety, and environmental challenges affecting our community.

Princeton has faced a worsening homelessness crisis for several years. Mayor and Council, local service providers, non-profit organizations, volunteers, and residents have made sustained efforts to respond; however, the absence of adequate provincial services, encampment supports, mental health and addiction resources, and cleanup funding has allowed the situation to deteriorate beyond the community's capacity to manage.

Within one week, the Princeton and District Volunteer Fire Department responded to two encampment-related fires in the community. Both incidents had the potential to result in catastrophic consequences. A more serious outcome was avoided only because of the rapid and professional response of our local volunteer firefighters. It is neither reasonable nor sustainable to expect a small rural volunteer fire department to repeatedly manage preventable emergencies arising from a broader crisis that requires provincial intervention.

The encampments in question are not located on municipally owned, leased, or controlled property. The Town therefore has neither the ownership authority nor the jurisdiction to independently manage, remediate, or authorize enforcement activities on these lands. Responsibility for addressing the conditions on provincially administered lands rests with the Province and its respective ministries and agencies.

The Town has repeatedly attempted to work through established ministerial channels to secure assistance in removing illegal dumping, accumulated waste, combustible materials, and environmental hazards associated with these encampments. Despite these efforts, no ministry has accepted clear responsibility or exercised the authority necessary to resolve the situation. This continued jurisdictional deflection has left the Town, its emergency responders, community organizations, and residents managing risks beyond municipal authority and capacity. Municipalities are established under provincial legislation and cannot supersede the Province's jurisdiction or exercise powers that have not been granted to them. The Town cannot direct the RCMP's operational decisions, and the RCMP cannot unilaterally remove individuals or encampments from Crown land without the appropriate legal authority and direction. The Province must therefore exercise its own jurisdiction and coordinate the ministries, agencies, land managers, health authorities, and public safety partners necessary to provide an effective response. The Town of Princeton is calling upon the Province to:

1. Immediately identify and designate a lead ministry or provincial agency responsible for coordinating the response;
2. Undertake an urgent assessment and cleanup of the affected encampment sites, including the removal of waste, combustible materials, illegal dumping, and environmental hazards;
3. Provide appropriate outreach, shelter, housing, mental health, substance-use, and harm-reduction supports for affected individuals;
4. Establish a coordinated public safety plan involving provincial land managers, the RCMP, Interior Health, BC Housing, emergency services, and local service providers; and
5. Provide sustainable funding to rural non-profit organizations and community agencies currently responding with severely limited resources.

Princeton is a community of approximately 3,000 residents, with more than 30 individuals currently estimated to be living without stable shelter. On a per-capita basis, this represents an extraordinary and unmanageable burden for a municipality of our size. Rural communities do not have access to the concentration of shelters, outreach teams, treatment services, supportive housing, mental health professionals, and addiction services available in larger urban centres. Provincial systems and health services remain heavily centralized, leaving rural communities to confront complex social and public health emergencies without the resources required to address them.

Local non-profit organizations and volunteer groups are operating on shoestring budgets, struggling to maintain basic services while demand continues to grow. Their dedication cannot be treated as a substitute for adequately funded provincial programs and services. Nor can the Province continue to rely upon municipal staff, volunteer firefighters, local organizations, and residents to absorb the consequences of gaps in provincial service delivery.

Town of Princeton

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The Town of Princeton has made every reasonable effort to work constructively within the Province's ministerial and administrative processes. Those processes have not produced the leadership, coordination, or action our community requires. The situation now poses a clear and growing risk to public safety, human health, the environment, emergency responders, and individuals living in these encampments.

Rural residents are entitled to equitable access to provincial services and protections. Princeton deserves the same level of attention, coordination, and support that would be expected if this crisis were occurring in a major urban centre.

The Town of Princeton is therefore formally requesting that the Province of British Columbia act without further delay, exercise its jurisdictional authority, and work directly with the Town, local residents, Indigenous communities, service providers, and non-profit organizations to implement an immediate and sustainable response.

Sincerely,



Mayor Spencer Coyne
Town of Princeton

Cc:

Regional District Okanagan-Similkameen, Chair Mark Pendergraft
Upper Similkameen Indian Band, Chief Charlie Allison
Princeton Family Services Society, Chelsea Jwaszko
Princeton and District Community Services Society, Becky Vermette
Princeton RCMP Detachment, Sgt. Keith Rogers