



December 5, 2020

Dear Parents of the Vancouver Japanese Language School,

As you may know, First United Church Community Ministry Society is planning to redevelop our property at 320 East Hastings Street, beginning in the summer of 2021. We urgently need to find appropriate spaces for our existing programs so we can continue to operate for the next 2-3 years while our new building is constructed. One of the spaces we are planning to use is 467 Alexander Street, directly adjacent to Vancouver Japanese Language School.

First United Church has been operating in the DTES of Vancouver for 135 years, and for decades we have been part of a network of essential social services in this complex and resilient community. For the last decade, part of our ministry has been operating a shelter for women and men experiencing homelessness.

In our current building, we also operate a drop-in centre and serve over 200 breakfasts and lunches to the community in addition to operating the shelter. The drop-in is home to our community help desk, and important resource where residents can access emergency first aid, emergency clothing including underwear and socks, feminine hygiene products and other toiletries, and access to public phones, as well as incoming/outgoing mail and faxes. Over 400 residents of the DTES use the church as their permanent residence so that they have a stable address to maintain ID, banking information, and access to the Canada Revenue Agency and Service Canada supports like GST rebates, income assistance and CPP/OAS.

The drop-in and our meal service are the programs we operate that really animate our space.

We have heard the concerns you have raised through meetings with Darius Maze and Mitsuru Haga-Bronstyn. Originally when we looked at 467 Alexander Street, we had hoped to co-locate the drop-in/meal program with a men's only shelter in that space. After meeting with Darius and Mitsuru, as well as other community stakeholders, we now plan to house only the shelter in that space, and the shelter will be 50/50 co-ed women and men's spaces.

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**Located on unceded Musqueam, Squamish,
and Tsleil-Waututh Lands**

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After hearing your concerns for physical and emotional safety for you children, we agree that having hundreds of people visit the space every day of the week is not advisable.

As a result, here are the actions we are taking in planning our way forward:

- 467 Alexander will be a shelter-only facility with no drop-in services. We are not a line-up shelter, and do intakes by referral; there should never be the need for large congregations of community members outside of our facility
- The main "entrance" to the shelter will be from the alley between Alexander and Railway; the two doors on Alexander Street will be for emergency exits only, alarmed, and monitored by staff
- We will ensure extra support is provided each day by staff and residents to ensure all spaces around the school are safe, any litter (including discarded needles or other paraphernalia) are cleaned up and that no one is loitering around the school entrances or parking so that you can drop off and pick up your children as safely and as comfortably as possible
- Our other programs will be located at the following sites:
 - 368 Powell St – Administrative offices
 - 360 Jackson Ave – Chapel / Community Ministry Offices
 - 501 E. Hastings St – Help Desk
 - 620 Clark Drive – Kitchen Services

Please know that I will personally make every effort to keep you informed about how the development of the space is proceeding. If possible (depending on the pandemic), I would also like to invite you to an open house before the shelter is open for business so that you see the facility and how we plan to run it.

In the meantime, if any of you would like to visit me at First United to see how calm and quite it generally is in our building without a drop-in centre, I would welcome that. I am also available by zoom to hold virtual meetings – either with you as a group, or as individual households. Please do not hesitate to reach out: clansdowne@firstunited.ca or www.calendly.com/clansdowne or by phone at 604.335.8988.

Blessings to you,



The Rev. Dr. Carmen Lansdowne
Executive Director