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**Province of
British Columbia
Legislative Assembly**



David Eby, MLA
(Vancouver-Point Grey)

February 2, 2015

COPY

Minister Coralee Oakes
Ministry of Community, Sport and Social Development
Victoria, BC

VIA FAX: 250 387-4312

Dear Minister:

Re: Invitation to open house on failure of local governance on University Endowment Lands

I write to you in your role as the head of local government for Vancouver's University Endowment Lands neighbourhood.

Despite what I thought was our shared understanding that the governance system for Vancouver's University Endowment Lands is broken, since it appoints you as "mayor" for a community you have no connection with and to which you owe no democratic accountability, disappointingly little has changed since I asked you to act quickly to fix this system.

On March 24th of last year, almost a year ago, you said to me that you had people on the ground, working hard on governance reform for the UEL. You said, and it was recorded in Hansard, that: "The work that we're currently doing right now is gathering the facts about the current state of the UEL and understanding where the temperature is to move forward."

Let me tell you that the temperature in the community is very high indeed.

As I told you a year ago, need for this reform is urgent given the plans to construct over 1,200 new units of housing in the UEL as part of the Block F development. Unfortunately, rather than fix the broken UEL governance model before the community doubles in size (and in demands on the administrator at the UEL office) the approach of the Ministry seems to be to move so slowly that the effect is the same as doing nothing at all.

I am writing today to provide you with additional information in order to encourage you to delegate additional staff to expedite what I hope are your reform efforts, and to invite you to hear some of these concerns first hand at an upcoming community meeting.

The need for reform of governance in the UEL before Block F construction begins

For most residents, the failure of the current governance model is best illustrated by the reality that the massive Block F development is proceeding despite the absence of an updated Official Community Plan. The old OCP did not anticipate a high density commercial and residential development in an area that – at the time the original plan was written – was considered protected parkland. The OCP simply does not correspond to the reality of Block F, leaving administrators, developers and the community adrift.

Once the scope of the Block F development became clear, a motion from the Resident Advisory Committee raised in early 2013 requested that the Ministry urgently “proceed with a review of the Official Community Plan” in order that UEL staff, the developer, and the community would have some level of certainty about how the UEL will grow.

A recent UEL newsletter article sets out the response to this very sensible request for a comprehensive and updated plan: “Action by [UEL] administration to date: nothing.”

A mayor that failed to direct staff to prepare an official community plan that anticipated and planned for the doubling of her local community’s population, and leveraged that development for maximum community benefit, would not be re-elected. Unfortunately, democratic accountability for UEL residents, particularly with respect to their local government failing to work with them to plan for the future, is a luxury they do not enjoy.

The challenges faced by the community extend beyond Block F

Beyond the challenge of Block F and the developer’s rezoning application which is still under consideration by your Ministry, many other issues in the UEL community are being neglected because of this outdated and broken local government model. In November I received a copy of the University Hill Connections Newsletter, which outlined several major recent failings of the governance system in which the UNA’s resident advisory council passes motions making specific requests of your Ministry and then nothing happens.

Many of the issues addressed in the motions involve basic administrative tasks that would be addressed by an appropriately resourced local government. For example, one neglected motion requests movement on the issue of “the use of our capital reserve fund to commence and carry out capital projects...for which money has already been saved...planning work done and budgets set.”

Other motions involve important policy reforms that would improve community amenities and services, like the motion to establish a policy for “Development Cost Charges (DCCs) to support general improvements to the community,” or the motion for “a review of UEL Bylaws and enforcement” following an incident where a resident complained “that the house across the street from her was abandoned and infested with vermin.”

Still other motions seek someone, anyone, to take on the advocacy role of local government for local residents. For example, one motion requests “that UEL-administration investigate how the overall firefighting cost for the UBC/UEL service is allocated to the UEL.” Another asks that someone from the Ministry step up and make a request of, paradoxically, the Ministry, specifically to request “the Ministry reconsider the cancellation of the \$60,000 grant [the community] received for some years in lieu of the normal municipal grants...”

Beyond these issues, constituents of the University Endowment Lands have come to my office to express concerns about the failure of the Development Permit process for new homes proposed in the area.

Development Permit Process

The absurdity of the current situation becomes very clear in light of the legislative requirement that UEL community members to write to you, the Minister, to make submissions on the architectural form and placement of a proposed new home in the UEL community. This week, your Deputy Minister spent the morning hearing submissions from residents about the design and placement of a single home in the community.

In communities across BC, these submissions would be made to a local government administrator, not to a Deputy Minister. That such letters are received by your office, and then assigned to senior Ministry staff, is a waste of resources, and worse, means that decisions made on issues important to community members are not made by people connected, in any understandable way, to the local community.

I received a copy of a letter from a community member, written to you, to request review of a decision to approve an exemption from current development permit rules. In that letter she wrote a moving summary of the issue the community faces:

Building strong communities takes time and requires strong leaders who are ready and able to defend the rights of a community to set limits on new construction to ensure that shared values are respected and upheld. In this way, a strong community acknowledges and supports the subtle yet enduring social contract that exists between individuals and which provides a sound foundation to the quality of life lived within its borders.

[...]

The process that culminated in the approval of these plans, and in particular the variances, is deeply flawed and in urgent need of repair. Moreover, it demonstrates the ugly consequences of a governance model that allows an unelected, and therefore unaccountable, individual to make key decisions that will adversely affect this community for years to come. It is not right that this is so. As citizens of the Province of British Columbia, we in the UEL deserve better.

The former Chair of the University Endowment Lands Residents' Advisory Council provided his blunt assessment of the situation to the community in November of this year:

We do have an administration, albeit one headquartered somewhere else, but we don't have a government. To say the Minister of Community, Sport and Social Development is the 'mayor' of the UEL is a joke. We need our own local politicians whose job it is to represent the local community, understand its needs and aspirations, and instruct our own administration on what needs to be done. We need a local government.

While I realize the bizarre nature of this invitation, and I hope you do as well, I would like to invite you, as the head of local government for the UEL, to visit the community you govern and hear these concerns first hand. I hope you will come. If you are unable to attend, I will bring these concerns and questions to you in Victoria during the Estimates process.

The open house on these matters will be held on **Thursday, March 5, 2015 at 6:00 p.m. in the UEL Community Space, located at 300-5755 Dalhousie Road.** We can assure you that we will provide space for a respectful and thoughtful and non-partisan dialogue with your constituents so that you may be better informed about the issues in the community.

If you are not able to attend, I encourage you to send someone from the Ministry to take notes and relay concerns from your constituents to you.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'David Eby', written over a horizontal line.

David Eby, MLA
Vancouver-Point Grey