

August 5, 2020

Kate Korte
Editor-in-Chief of the Martlet
B011 Student's Union Building
University of Victoria

Mayor Lisa Helps and Council
1 Centennial Square
Victoria

RE: Motion and complaints surrounding our newspaper distribution boxes

As Editor-in-Chief of the Martlet, I am proud of our publication and our continued commitment to providing factual and independent local news in the City of Victoria. The boxes are an accessible way for individuals to obtain news. Although I agree that those not in use and merely collecting trash should be removed, the Martlet's boxes are very much in use and we try our best to ensure they are tidy. Particularly during COVID-19, these boxes have proved to be essential.

As the Martlet was not consulted regarding this motion, I hope to assist your understanding of the systems we have in place to maintain our distribution boxes. I have attached a brief report of our procedures. We are currently undergoing an audit of our boxes as we planned to place three brand new boxes on the streets this fall, designed and built in partnership with a local artist, Camosun's Nexus, and Cinecenta.

My dedicated and hardworking staff of student journalists has devoted their time to tackling stories on pressing local issues, such as homelessness, overdose deaths, systemic racism in policing, and COVID-19 protocols. Frankly, council, I am disappointed that this motion seeks to remove those stories from Victoria's streets.

I would like to recommend that the City further explore additional options, such as a simple registration system, whereby newspapers can indicate the locations of the boxes and who is responsible for upkeep to the city.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kate', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Kate Korte
Editor-in-Chief

ATTACHMENT:

The Martlet is committed to understanding your complaints

Thank you for bringing these complaints to our attention. Before delving further into our processes, there are two central items in the motion that we would like to clarify:

1)"With use of the internet and libraries, these boxes are no longer needed and most are often empty or filled with garbage."

Although many people do get their news online, libraries were closed during COVID-19. One individual that is a long-time Martlet supporter did not have access to the internet because libraries were closed, and had to read our physical paper to read the stories. Like this supporter, many people in Victoria are seniors or less technologically literate and may not have access to the internet.

Some people also simply prefer to read through a physical paper, as old-fashioned as that may seem. For some, they keep the paper to have a physical souvenir of a story. One of our issues in January featured a UVic student and Gitxsan man, Kolin Sutherland-Wilson, on the cover. We produced 5 000 copies of the paper, and we ran out of our stock.

The internet also poses challenges to small local newspapers. Social media algorithms place engagement (comments, likes, link clicks) of foremost importance. Although we may post articles everyday, many of them do not reach our community as regularly because of these algorithms.

2) "Companies are benefiting from public space without paying for it, including using boxes for advertising, whereas small business owners have to pay a fee for sandwich boards and also must receive a licence."

The Martlet is an independent student newspaper and a nonprofit organization. We would actually welcome the opportunity to have our boxes licensed and registered. This is the set up we have with UVic, which is further explained under "procedures for newspaper distribution at UVic."

We have assembled the following information into this supplementary document:

- Staff responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the boxes
- Audit procedures for distribution boxes (in progress, to be completed Fall 2020)
- Procedures for newspaper distribution at UVic

Staff responsible for boxes

The Martlet understands that we are responsible for our own newspaper distribution. In the summer, our staff distributes our paper monthly. In the fall, we have biweekly issues.

- Draven Clemah, Business Manager - responsible for ensuring distribution runs smoothly and completing an audit of all boxes
 - Draven has received one complaint in the last year regarding a damaged box. He went to the location and returned the box to our office within hours.
- Mark and John - contracted per issue, responsible for distributing our paper throughout the CRD and in the boxes, responsible for taking out old papers and/or trash in boxes
- Lech - contracted per issue, responsible for distributing our paper on campus and to various businesses downtown

The Martlet is proud that we have not had to lay off any of these individuals thus far, and we paid them throughout the COVID-19 period when many of Lech's regular stops were closed.

All Martlet staff are asked to remove any garbage and inform us that we need to add papers if they are empty. This is an additional casual way that we ensure they are not becoming trash bins.

Audit procedures for distribution boxes

Draven Clemah is currently undergoing an audit of all box and distribution locations. This audit will be completed with Mark, John, and Lech's assistance, and it will be completed by Fall 2020.

Due to COVID-19, nearly all of the businesses and professional offices downtown were closed. There were also very few people on campus. At this time, the boxes were the only way we could distribute our papers.

We have 3 brand new boxes that will replace 3 of the oldest boxes. At this time, due to COVID-19, we cannot afford to renovate further. The 3 new boxes were built in January by a contracted artist. They cost the Martlet, Cinecenta, and the Nexus a total of \$968.

Procedures for newspaper distribution at UVic

Our papers are distributed to various boxes around the campus. Lech is responsible for this. We pay UVic a small fee of \$20 to essentially rent space in a box the university owns. We have not had any complaints about the tidiness of our boxes. All Martlet staff are instructed to maintain them and add papers if they are empty while they are walking around campus daily.