



GONZALES NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATION
359 Richmond Avenue Victoria, BC V8S 3Y2

May 12, 2022

Dear Mayor and Council,

As recent participants in the mediation between the Fairfield Gonzales Community Association and the Gonzales Neighbourhood Association, we are grateful for the assistance of City Council in funding the mediation, for the cooperation of the FGCA in scheduling and conducting the mediation, and for the mediation skills of our mediator, Ms. Kathleen Bellamano.

We have received and reviewed the mediator's report, and while it is in most respects accurate, we are concerned that in the section of the report entitled "Proposals for Solutions", the report fails to capture completely the nature of the proposals from FGCA or the response of the GNA. We particularly draw your attention to sub-paragraphs i, iii, and iv of that section.

Sub-paragraph i states, "FGCA proposed a referendum for residents of Gonzales residents (sic) regarding how they want to be represented. Proposal was not supported by GNA." Sub-paragraph ii notes a proposal for representation of GNA on FGCA board. Sub-paragraph iii states, "FGCA proposed an education campaign for Fairfield and Gonzales residents regarding the differences in the two organizations and pros and cons of one organization or two before making a decision. Proposal was not supported by GNA." In fact, the proposal for an education campaign in iii was an integral part of the referendum proposal in sub-paragraph i. In that proposal, the FGCA stipulated that to recognize the result of a referendum approving a separate organization for Gonzales, it would require a 35% participation rate. Both the GNA and the mediator objected to this rate as unrealistic.

The GNA agreed that an education campaign was a good idea. We agree that local residents are often uninformed about civic matters in their neighbourhoods. However, the education campaign was not divorced from the referendum. GNA had numerous questions and concerns about the referendum and the associated education campaign such as how the referendum question would be formulated, what methodology would be used in conducting the referendum, who would undertake the education campaign, and how both the referendum and the education campaign would be funded. **These questions were not answered by the FGCA proposal, nor was the GNA's question of why another survey was needed when there had already been one which supported a separate organization for Gonzales.** In light of this, the GNA did not support what was actually a single proposal as set out in subparagraphs i and iii.

Sub-paragraph iv states, “FGCA proposed a long-term plan GNA to assume representation for Gonzales residents during which time FGCA would provide guidance and support on developing resources and infrastructure. Proposal was not supported by GNA.” This appears to imply that FGCA proposed that GNA separately represent Gonzales residents, but with their assistance and guidance. This was not as we understood the nature of the FGCA proposal which was rather that GNA would function in some unspecified way as part of the FGCA board and organization for a period of two years, after which FGCA would consider whether the GNA was sufficiently mature to function separately.

It is also incomplete to state “Proposal was not supported by GNA” without further comment. **GNA was not averse to some idea of a cooperative organization including the GNA and FGCA for a limited period of time to facilitate GNA’s development. However, the GNA believed that the details of this arrangement would need to be worked out before agreement was possible.** In particular, the GNA believed that the two-year time frame was excessive (GNA proposed six months, as noted in sub-paragraph v), that the benefits which the FGCA could confer on the GNA during this cooperative period were unclear and would need to be specified, and that there should be some guarantee, at the end of whatever period was chosen, that FGCA would support the separation and independence of GNA.

The timing of the mediation did not allow for discussion of these possibilities. During the mediation, the GNA expressed their belief that this idea could be the basis for an agreement, provided the issues raised by the GNA could be satisfactorily addressed and that the actual nature of the cooperative organization could be specified. In light of this, after the close of mediation, **the GNA president and a second member of the GNA mediation team contacted the FGCA president and a second member of their mediation team, proposing that the two organizations appoint a smaller group to continue discussions of this possibility.** A working group from both organizations subsequently met to discuss whether this was feasible. The meeting ended on a positive note, but both organizations will require approval of their Boards for further steps and the FGCA board does not meet until June.

We hope that this clarifies the mediator’s report. We believe that while no agreement was reached between the two organizations, the situation was not as definitive as appears from the mediator’s brief summary, nor was the response of the GNA to FGCA proposals a simple, unqualified rejection as the wording to the report might imply.

Thank you for your attention to this matter and ongoing efforts to make it possible for Gonzales residents to have their own neighbourhood association.

Regards,

Susanne Rautio, President

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