



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

VIA EMAIL

Ref. 66740

May 3, 2024

John McNamee
Acting Chief Coroner
BC Coroners Service
PO Box 9259 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9J4
Email: chiefcoronercorrespondence@gov.bc.ca

Dear John McNamee:

Thank you for your correspondence of April 4, 2024, regarding the inquest verdict into the deaths of Mary Ann Garlow and Dennis James Guay. I appreciate the thoughtful consideration that you and the jury have given to this very important matter.

The Province acknowledges that fire safety and critical incident prevention and response in social housing are crucially important issues, especially given the unique housing state in the Downtown Eastside. As such, we are committed to identifying enhanced practices that ensure safety for all affordable housing residents and prevent future tragedies. This work includes priority actions in response to the two jury recommendations addressed to the Minister of Housing.

Regarding Recommendation 23 to establish an annual fire safety conference, I agree that an annual meeting with key partners would add value and enhance current efforts underway aimed at ensuring safety in Single Room Occupancy (SRO) buildings in the Downtown Eastside. Ministry of Housing staff are currently reviewing options for an annual event to be initiated by 2025.

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Regarding Recommendation 24 related to coordination to acquire land for shelters and affordable housing, the Province through BC Housing is very active in working with local governments, non-profit housing organizations, and other partners to secure land contributions to support new developments. Much of this work is achieved through BC Housing's funding programs, including the Community Housing Fund, which recently announced funding for 40 new projects across BC, providing approximately 3,500 rental homes on sites owned by various partner organizations.

In March 2023, the Province released the Downtown Eastside Provincial Partnership Plan, which prioritizes a regional housing approach within Metro Vancouver. In alignment with jury Recommendation 24, the Ministry of Housing is currently considering options for an enhanced approach to regional coordination, including land contributions, in relation to affordable and supportive housing.

Revitalizing the Downtown Eastside is a key priority for the Province, and renovation and redevelopment of SROs is integral to achieving this goal. Our approach includes working in partnership with the Government of Canada and the City of Vancouver to develop a trilateral SRO investment strategy. This work is currently underway.

We recognize the urgent need to create more affordable housing and shelter spaces, and we will continue working with partners to identify appropriate land for future projects to serve the needs of the Downtown Eastside community as well as the Metro Vancouver region as a whole.

Thank you again for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ravi Kahlon', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Housing