

July 2017

*From the George Pearson Centre Resident Council Working Group*

My name is Michael, and I am reading this letter on behalf of the George Pearson Centre Resident Council Working Group on Redevelopment.

We are nine Pearson residents who are members of the Pearson Resident Council. Our position on the recommendation is against, though we support many aspects of the application. We believe the lack of larger group living denies people with disabilities a valid choice on the spectrum of housing and care, and reflects a failure to meet several commitments made in the Policy Statement<sup>1</sup>.

The commitment residents have heard from VCH since the beginning was that we would be able to live on the Pearson site, if we choose to – and that the models of housing would match our diverse choices.

At the June 2016 Resident Council meeting, a critical mass of residents became truly aware that there would be no New Pearson on this land for those who would choose it as their preferred housing option. Although a complex care building is planned for the site, it was realized at this meeting that Pearson residents are not prioritized for living there, nor will it be designed for our needs<sup>2</sup>.

We formed a Working Group and discussed the history of resident participation in the redevelopment planning, research done with residents on choices in housing and care<sup>3,4,5</sup>, as well as the planning documents.

The result of these meetings is that the Resident Council Working Group supports a spectrum of choices in housing and supports as follows:

- 1) We support independent accessible housing and better supports for those who choose to live alone, with a partner, or roommate
- 2) We support the 4 or 6 bedroom home for people who choose this smaller grouping
- 3) We support a larger group living model, which shares resources and social spaces.

The decision to exclude residents from living in a new larger group living situation on the Pearson site is in opposition to what residents had expressed in earlier research. It is not what was agreed upon in the Pearson Dogwood Consensus Document, which was supposed to provide the foundation for the Redevelopment planning and decisions for housing and supports.

Earlier research with residents (in 2008 and 2012) revealed a desire to retain, to some degree, the unique Pearson community. Residents envisioned a larger building containing small house units with 6-12 people per unit. These units were neighbours to other units, and collectively they shared services and offered ease of socializing. This community of people with disabilities is at the same time integrated into an even larger community.

Many people choose to live at Pearson for the benefits they experience here. We believe this would be a preferred option for other people with disabilities as well if it was designed appropriately. Pearson is almost always full, with new residents coming in regularly, often with complex medical needs.

There are two main advantages to the larger group model: one is the social aspect and sense of community. Second are the many resources we can access without leaving home, which is so important when the weather is cold or you aren't feeling well. The socializing and shared resources are the same reasons that many able-bodied people choose to live collectively.

In addition, the Working Group knows that, for many residents, living in a larger group offers a lesser chance of isolation and decreases the risk of abuse, especially for those who cannot speak for themselves.

In our discussions, the RCWG determined that several commitments stated in the policy plan had not been met. Two significant areas are as follows:

- 1) Consultation with residents has been minimal beyond the individualized planning. Many residents face barriers to participating in the planning process – including hearing impairment, difficulty speaking as well as memory, physical, medical and cognitive challenges. It should be noted that

at the Working Group's request, VCH has recently consulted with residents, generating two reports.

- 2) The second area is regarding working with residents in the individualized planning: In this process, residents were not offered any larger group living option, here or elsewhere. We regret this missed opportunity to gather data on how many current residents would choose this option.

Here are some direct quotes from Pearson residents about the redevelopment plan:

- "There are a lot of residents who aren't able to participate in planning, and we need to speak up for them. It's hard to speak for somebody else but we are their neighbours."
- "At what point was the decision made that there would be no new Pearson? In PRRG we worked with the understanding that we were planning for a new version of Pearson."
- "This is in opposition to what many residents want. We should not be denied this choice on this site."
- "Why do other groups, who do not live here at Pearson, have a voice in this planning and Pearson residents have a lesser voice?"
- "Why is it okay for Dogwood to build a facility for them, but it isn't okay for Pearson residents?"
- "Some of us would choose to be together in order to gain more services."
- "If we are scattered across the site I know we won't have access to the same services I get now in the same safe and convenient manner without battling the outside weather."
- "Being grouped together has benefits many of us treasure – and does not preclude being integrated into the greater community"
- "We should suggest grouping residents more. I wish a balance – I like my privacy but always want someone nearby in case I need help."
- "Why can't we have housing for people with disabilities on the lower floors together, with ramps, and everyone else who can use stairs above us?"
- "We need to convince City Council that we aren't nearly as afraid of the word 'institution' as they are. We like to live together, with privacy still. The social aspect, including Recreation is just as important as the health care."

- “If we can convince the City that we wish to live together as a community it would mean significant cost savings & efficiencies.”
- Regarding the Total Care Worker – “Who are these amazing multi skilled people, where will you find them, and what will they be paid?”
- “It sounds like semantics – so rather than call it an institution – call it a community with shared care. It’s what’s inside an institution that makes it good or bad, not the fact that people live together”
- Who says that a community can’t be made of people with disabilities? Why does community only matter if there able-bodied people included in it?

**In Summary:** Living collectively and sharing resources is not a concept unique to people with disabilities. We believe, through living here at Pearson, that it can increase independence by providing more social interaction, more immediate supports and more on-site services. In contrast, we know that for some people with disabilities, living alone will increase risk of social isolation and opportunities for abuse, as there will be no witnesses to the care being delivered.

At its essence, this is about choice for people with disabilities. We’ve heard people argue against any number of groups of people living together. Yet we know that some people, with or without a disability, like to live alone, while others like to live in a group. Resident Council supports the full range of housing and care options.

Thank you.

Appendix 1: Background Information on Groups: RC, RCWG, PAR & PRRG

<sup>1</sup> Appendix 2: Policy Statement Commitments Not Met

<sup>2</sup> Appendix 3: Beyond Medical Care: Services Valued at Pearson

<sup>3</sup> PAR Report 2008

<sup>4</sup> PRRG Report 1-2012

<sup>5</sup> PRRG Report 2-2013

**George Pearson Centre currently has 114 residents. Due to cognitive or neurological impairment many of the residents do not have the capacity to understand what is asked in the enclosed petition and were therefore unable to sign the petition. There are 50 signatures on this petition. These signatures belong to the majority of those residents with the capacity to understand the housing issues before them.**

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**George Pearson Residents call upon Vancouver City Council to approve the housing designs and Model of Care Framework proposed by Vancouver Coastal Health. Residents want options to live in shared or single units.**

**We the undersigned, are residents of George Pearson Centre (GPC). Our home is being replaced with independent housing units with supports as part of the Pearson Dogwood Redevelopment Project.**

**When these new units are built, we the residents of George Pearson Centre, will be relocated.**

**Residents of GPC have participated on the George Pearson Centre Stakeholder Steering Committee, attended consultation meetings and contributed to the development and design of the proposed new housing units with supports and Model of Care Framework. Those residents who have not participated have been kept informed through Resident and Family Engagement Sessions, by the GPC Residents' Council, and by advocacy groups such as Disability Alliance of BC**

**(DABC) and Community And Residents Mentors Association (CARMA).**

**Given our participation in this process and our expectation that we will have options and choice in how we want to live and who we want to live with, the residents of George Pearson Centre want our requirements for shared living options respected. We want a choice to live in six or four unit homes, or in the single units, with access to care and supports that centre on our needs and fulfill our life choices.**

**We the undersigned residents of George Pearson Centre, call upon the City of Vancouver to approve the housing with supports design and Model of Care Framework proposed by Vancouver Coastal Health and endorsed by the George Pearson Centre Stakeholder Steering Committee, CARMA and the City of Vancouver Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee.**