

# OUR LAND IS OUR FUTURE

UNION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA INDIAN CHIEFS

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July 13, 2021

Shirley and Ken MacKinnon  
Maple Ridge, BC

Via Email: [shimack@shaw.ca](mailto:shimack@shaw.ca)

**OPEN LETTER RE: Spuzzum First Nation's Offer to Purchase the Property Located at 39800 Trans Canada Highway, Boston Bar, BC, V0K 1C0 Legally described as PID: 003-868-591 Lot 1B Yale Division District Excerpt Plan B291 ("Lot 1B")**

Dear Shirley and Ken MacKinnon,

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) writes to you today to express our unconditional support of the Spuzzum First Nation's fair and reasonable offer to purchase Lot 1B from you, to encourage you strongly to accept their offer, and to take steps to complete the sale of this land to Spuzzum.

The UBCIC is a collective advocacy body representing over 120 First Nations from across the province. Our mandate is to pursue the implementation, exercise, and recognition of our inherent Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights, and to protect our Lands and Waters through the exercise of our laws and jurisdiction. The UBCIC strengthens First Nations' assertions of their Aboriginal Title, Rights, Treaty Rights and Right of Self Determination as Peoples. We support First Nations and communities to promote and protect Sovereignty within their traditional territories.

We understand that you made an offer to purchase Lot 1B – the site of the former Alexandra Road House, located in unceded Nlaka'pamux territory – from the current seller, and that this sale has been accepted but is pending completion on July 31, 2021. We are aware that Spuzzum First Nation approached you as soon as they learned of the sale, and made a formal offer to buy Lot 1B from you, an offer encompassing the selling price, as well as the total sum of your legal fees and any additional costs incurred. Your response, we are told, was to offer to sell the land to Spuzzum at \$200,000 over your purchase agreement with the original seller, a clear attempt to secure an enormous profit at the expense of a small First Nation with limited means. Before Spuzzum could even respond to your inflated asking price, you withdrew your offer to sell the land.

Since submitting your offer to purchase Lot 1B, you have been informed by Spuzzum Chief James Hobart of the deep cultural and historical importance of this land to Spuzzum First Nation. You were told that the land is the location of Spuzzum's traditional winter village site of Tikwalus, used and occupied since time immemorial until they were violently displaced by settlers through an unlawful pre-emption in the 1860s. The illegality of this pre-emption resulting in the dispossession of Spuzzum from their village, dislocation, and trauma, has been formally

acknowledged by the federal government and redress for this loss is currently the subject of negotiations through the specific claims process. Since this process does not return lands that were taken illegally to affected First Nations, this sale presents a crucial opportunity to right a past wrong.

Chief Hobart also informed you that this land contains a Spuzzum cemetery (recorded as archaeological site DkRi-57) and numerous other confirmed archaeological sites. Spuzzum has requested a Ministerial order for an investigation to be undertaken to confirm the likely presence of human remains beyond the known gravesites. The acceptance of this request to investigate will place significant restrictions on how the land may be used.

Despite this knowledge, you remain recalcitrant and steadfast in your refusal to sell this land to Spuzzum so that they may safeguard what belongs to them for future generations, and care for their ancestors according to their own laws and protocols. As Indigenous communities across Turtle Island are grieving the loss of their children due to confirmation in recent weeks of unmarked mass gravesites at former Indian Residential Schools, your refusal to accept Spuzzum's reasonable offer is particularly callous and unconscionable.

Due to widespread international media attention, there is now a global awareness of the extent of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples by successive Canadian governments. There is collective recognition amongst non-Indigenous Canadians that they must pressure federal and provincial governments to uphold international human rights obligations, including the care and protection of Indigenous burial sites. Recent passing of provincial and federal legislation to ensure British Columbia's and Canada's laws align with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is testament to the growing awareness of non-Indigenous peoples in this country of the need for concrete action and justice. While these obligations rest with governments, individuals also bear responsibility for transforming the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples who now live together on our unceded lands. When presented with opportunities to do the right thing, it is important to recognize and accept them in the interest of justice and to repair relations moving forward.

The small communities in Nlaka'pamux territory – Lytton, Boston Bar, Ashcroft – are no longer anonymous places, due to the recent unprecedented weather events that made international headlines. This issue is of paramount importance to Spuzzum and we reiterate they have our full support and we will use our collective voice to ensure that they regain control of the lands where their ancestors are buried. We implore you to assist Spuzzum by accepting their fair and reasonable offer to compensate you for the transfer of Lot 1B to them. You have the opportunity to be on the right side of history, and we hope that you will seize it.

**On behalf of the UNION OF BC INDIAN CHIEFS**



Grand Chief Stewart Phillip  
President



Chief Don Tom  
Vice-President



Kukpi7 Judy Wilson  
Secretary-Treasurer

CC:

The Honourable Murray Rankin, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation  
The Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development  
The Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations  
BC Specific Claims Working Group  
BC Assembly of First Nations  
First Nations Summit  
Assembly of First Nations Chiefs Committee on Lands Territories and Resources