



West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund

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VIA EMAIL (Clerks@burnaby.ca)

November 3, 2016

Burnaby Mayor and Council
c/o Office of the City Clerk
4949 Canada Way
Burnaby, BC V5G 1M2

Dear Mayor Corrigan and Burnaby Councillors:

Re: Metrotown Development Plan

In light of Burnaby Council's consideration of the Metrotown Development Plan, I write to urge you to consider the potential impacts of displacement from rental housing for vulnerable residents, particularly women.

I am both a resident of Burnaby and a representative of West Coast LEAF, a Vancouver-based non-profit organization. West Coast LEAF is a non-profit organization that was formed in 1985, the year the equality guarantees of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* came into force. Our mission is to achieve equality by changing historic patterns of discrimination against women in BC through equality rights litigation, law reform, and public legal education. We have a particular expertise in the socio-economic rights of women.

Through municipal policy decisions like the Metrotown Development Plan, civic governments have the power to either enhance or undermine the physical safety and economic security of women and their children. Rezoning to permit new development of condominiums in Metrotown is likely to lead to the demolition of the current homes of lower-income renters. Given that women are disproportionately impacted by poverty—especially Indigenous women, women with disabilities and chronic health issues, single mothers, immigrant and refugee women, and racialized women—they experience disproportionate impacts as a result of loss of affordable rental housing. Women and children living in precarious financial circumstances are more likely to live in the older and purpose-built units subject to demolition and redevelopment, are more likely to struggle to find new housing that they can afford when that housing is lost, and are at serious risk of homelessness.

Women without secure access to housing are at a heightened risk of violence. A lack of affordable rental housing presents a major barrier to women fleeing intimate partner violence. Furthermore, research shows that women who lose their housing may adopt survival strategies such as cycling in and out of abusive relationships to secure shelter, trading sex for shelter, or living in overcrowded, unsafe, or unsanitary conditions. Women are often forced to undertake

such measures rather than live on the street or access homeless shelters because such options expose them to further violence or the risk of having their children apprehended by the child protection system. Clearly, no one should be forced into circumstances that jeopardize their safety or the safety of their children due to a loss of affordable housing.

While the development and regulation of affordable housing may not be within the traditional jurisdiction of municipal governments in British Columbia, the reality is that all levels of government in Canada have an obligation to take reasonably available steps to support human rights, including women's equality. We also know that other larger municipalities in the Lower Mainland are already taking action to do what is within their power to address the affordable housing crisis in BC.

With this in mind, we urge Burnaby to seriously consider the human rights issues at play in municipal decisions affecting rental housing, and the particular ways in which redevelopment decisions may impact the lives and equality of women and children. We strongly urge Burnaby to take a leadership role by protecting the affordable housing that does exist within the municipality.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Milne', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kendra Milne
Director of Law Reform
West Coast LEAF