



January 22, 2021

Dear Cowichan Valley Businesses,

Re: Challenging Racist Behavior in the Cowichan Valley

This letter is to advise you that we are aware of many complaints regarding treatment of our citizens who are assumed to be connected to the Cowichan Tribes community. We are requesting that each of our businesses in the Cowichan Valley seek understanding if there are any questions or concerns with some of your clientele accessing your businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. Cowichan Tribes did issue a Shelter at Home Order for their members. The order is public and accessible by each of you to better educate yourself and your staff if there are questions of who is safe to be in public. We would also suggest you read the BC Health Regulations to better understand the regulations all citizens are to follow no matter race.

It is extremely important that our businesses understand that treatment of our citizens based on the colour of their skin is unacceptable, who has COVID based on the assumption of their place of residence and race is wrong and must be corrected. We have had reports of mistreatment from citizens who are not members of Cowichan Tribes or do not reside on Cowichan Tribes reserve lands. These reports are confirmation that citizens are being singled out based on race.

We also want to clarify the access of businesses to deliver on reserve. The intention of the check points under the Shelter at Home order is to stop visitors and limit movement between the 7 villages of Cowichan Tribes. The order is not intended to cut off necessities to their members.

Deliveries of food, medicines, and maintenance repairs are permitted and have the same risks no matter address. It is a human rights violation to deny service based on race or residency; unless public order prevents entrance.

Quote from Mayor Staples:

The City of Duncan is home to 5000, Cowichan Tribes is home to 5012. We are neighbors, friends, and family. The lines between us exist on maps; the division between us exists in our minds, fed to us through ignorance and teachings passed down from generations before us. I have seen this change, heard more people speak out and stand up to racism and discrimination. While this is positive, it does not change the fact that right now in our community, racism exists, and too many people are afraid of what people might do or say when they go out to simply pick up groceries.

I cannot imagine what that must be like, to not feel safe, welcome or at home in the very place your ancestors come from. I cannot imagine how exhausting it must be, particularly during a global pandemic when faced with the additional fear of loved ones who are ill or at risk. This pandemic doesn't discriminate, only we can do that and only we can choose not to. The City is here for whatever is needed and we will work every day to speak up and confront racism in our communities. There is no room for it in Cowichan, racism does not deserve a home here and it is up to each of us to not give it one.

Michelle Staples
Mayor, City of Duncan

Quote from Mayor Siebring :

North Cowichan Mayor Al Siebring says there are some simple distinctions that help with clarity. For example, he says, "It's OK for a business to ask some fundamental, and universal questions about whether folks have travelled outside the country, whether they're under a travel-related isolation order, or whether they've shown any COVID-related symptoms. Those questions can be asked equally of everyone who enters the doors of a business. But what's not OK are questions like 'Do you live on Reserve?' That question is inappropriate because residency on reserve is, by its very nature, race-based. And business owners can get exactly the same information by asking the first list of questions, and those questions can be applied equally to everyone, without going to the race-based issue."

Al Siebring
Mayor, District of North Cowichan

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your urgent attention to this matter. We have all heard the phrase "we are all in this together," but until this moment we have not had to prove it in a meaningful way with our actions. This is our moment in the Cowichan Valley to prove we are a community and show each other care and support during a difficult time we are all facing.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at the office numbers below.

Sincerely,



Chief William Seymour
Cowichan Tribes
(250)748-3196



Mayor Michelle Staples
City of Duncan
(250) 466-9412



Mayor Al Siebring
District of North Cowichan
(250) 746-3117