

March 9, 2026

File # 0220-01

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An Open Letter from the Community of Fort St. John

To: The Government of the Province of British Columbia, including:

The Honourable Premier of British Columbia

The Honourable Minister of Finance

The Honourable Minister of Health

Northern Health Authority

Re: Postponement of Peace Villa Long-Term Care Facility Expansion

On behalf of City Council and the residents of Fort St. John, I am writing to express our deep concern regarding the postponement of construction for the Peace Villa long-term care expansion.

Peace Villa is a cornerstone of seniors' care in Fort St. John and the broader North Peace region. The planned third house has long been understood to be a critical expansion required to address both existing pressures and clearly anticipated future demand for long-term care and assisted living services. The postponement of this project has generated significant concern among seniors, families, and caregivers who rely on the availability of appropriate care close to home.

That concern is intensified by the fact that the Peace Villa expansion had previously received approval and was supported through a funding partnership involving the Province of British Columbia, Northern Health, and the Peace River Regional Hospital District. At both the local and regional levels, this expansion was widely understood to be a committed project intended to respond to well-documented and longstanding capacity challenges. The postponement of an approved project at this stage has introduced uncertainty for residents and families who have been planning around its anticipated delivery and for the community systems that depend on that capacity.

Peace Villa is currently operating at full capacity, with more than 70 individuals, including seniors who remain in hospital, waiting for long-term care placement. The delay of the expansion therefore has immediate and tangible consequences not only for seniors and their families, but also for hospital capacity and the broader health-care system serving the North Peace region. These impacts underscore the urgency of expanding long-term care capacity in a timely and predictable manner.

These local circumstances are consistent with broader provincial findings. In its recent report, *From Shortfall to Crisis*, the Office of the Seniors Advocate of British Columbia identified a growing, province-wide shortfall in long-term care capacity and emphasized that insufficient availability of long-term care beds contributes directly to prolonged hospital stays, increased system pressures, and uncertainty for seniors and their families. The experience of Fort St. John reflects this broader systemic challenge rather than an isolated or unexpected circumstance.

Council members have heard directly from residents who are deeply concerned about what this delay means for their ability to age safely and with dignity in their home community. For many seniors, access to appropriate care close to family, social supports, and familiar surroundings is not a preference, but a necessity. The uncertainty created by this postponement has heightened anxiety about limited options and extended wait times in a regional hub that continues to grow and serve surrounding communities.

The importance of local long-term care capacity has also been clearly identified through the City of Fort St. John's *Age-Friendly Assessment and Action Plan*. That work emphasized the need for appropriate housing and care options to enable seniors to remain in their community as they age and recognized that insufficient local capacity creates barriers to aging safely and with dignity. The postponement of the Peace Villa expansion runs counter to these long-standing, community-informed planning priorities and undermines the ability of the City and its partners to plan effectively for a growing senior population.

While we recognize the complexities inherent in provincial capital planning and health infrastructure delivery, the absence of a clear path forward for the Peace Villa expansion is troubling. Delays in long-term care infrastructure have foreseeable and avoidable impacts on community well-being, health outcomes, and confidence in the systems that residents rely upon. When previously approved projects are postponed without clear timelines or next steps, it becomes increasingly difficult for communities to plan responsibly and maintain trust in long-term care commitments.

Council acknowledges the Province's advancement of the Long-Term Care at Home program, which is intended to allow some seniors to remain safely in their homes through monitored and virtual services. While this initiative represents an important and innovative element of the Province's approach to seniors' care, it is not suitable for all seniors, particularly those with complex medical needs, limited caregiver support, or circumstances that make aging at home impractical. Both provincial analysis and local planning recognize that home-based and virtual supports cannot replace the need for physical long-term care for those with higher or more complex care needs.

The City of Fort St. John remains committed to working collaboratively with the Province of British Columbia and Northern Health to support positive health outcomes for our residents. We respectfully request clarity regarding the status of the Peace Villa expansion, including anticipated next steps and timelines, as well as any interim measures, beyond virtual services, that are being considered to address local long-term care capacity challenges. Such clarity is essential to support informed regional planning and

to maintain public confidence in long-term care infrastructure commitments that communities depend upon.

Sincerely,

Lilia Hansen
Mayor

cc: Jordan Kealy, MLA Peace River North