

***UBC Neighbourhoods
Taxation Working Group***

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March 27, 2017

By Email (bog.ubc@ubc.ca)

UBC Board of Governors
6328 Memorial Road, Room 121
Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

Dear Members of the Board of Governors:

UBC Neighbourhoods – Fire Service Charge

We are writing to request that the Board of Governors approach the provincial government (after the election) to seek the termination of the fire service charge recently imposed by the government on the UBC neighbourhoods.

We are a group of residents who are extremely concerned about this charge, which is unfair and threatens the financial viability of our community. While three of us are UNA Directors (Laura Cottle, Rose Wang, and Ying Zhou) and one is the Alternate Director for Metro Vancouver's Electoral Area A (Bill Holmes), we write as residents, not in our official capacities.

The Taxation Working Group was formed nearly a year ago, when we became aware of the provincial government's intention to impose the unfair and unjustified fire service charge. The Working Group has put much effort into opposing this charge: we have written letters to the Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development (Minister Fassbender) and the Minister of Finance (Minister de Jong); met with Minister Fassbender; met with our MLA, David Eby; written articles for our community newspaper, The Campus Resident; and convinced the UNA Board to write a letter to Minister Fassbender expressing that Board's opposition to the charge. In addition, we have made Freedom of Information requests that have provided insight into the government's decision to impose the charge.

We are not against our community paying its full share of fire protection costs. However, we believe that we have been doing so in the past through the general rural property tax imposed on us by the province, an amount of \$2.15 million for 2016. With a separate charge for fire protection service – \$1 million for the 2017-18 fiscal year and increasing thereafter – we believe that we now receive no services in return for payment of 70% of the general rural property tax. As we have recently learned, about 30% of the amount paid as general rural property tax funds a reduction in the amount of police tax we would otherwise pay, a reduction that is approximately \$350,000 for 2016. We are not aware of any services we receive for the remaining \$1.8 million of general rural property tax.

The provincial government has sought to justify the fire service charge by a comparison of the taxation of our community with the taxation of property owners in the University Endowment Lands (UEL). However, that comparison is based on incorrect and misleading information; in particular, it ignores the fact that UEL residents do not pay the general rural property tax. The province already taxes our community unfairly relative to UEL residents, and the fire service charge makes the unfairness even greater.

The other rationale given by the provincial government is that we are being treated the same as other unincorporated areas. This is obviously untrue when the comparison is with the UEL. For other unincorporated areas, this rationale does not take into account the purpose for which general rural property tax is levied nor the differences between the UBC neighbourhoods and those other areas, including the fact that we pay to maintain the roads in our community and we contribute towards Metro Vancouver's Major Road Network.

Our letter of May 23, 2016 to the Minister of Finance (copy included with this letter) contains a detailed critique of the government's rationale for the introduction of the fire service charge.¹ See, in particular, the attachment to the letter

We look forward to confirmation that the Board of Governors will, on behalf of residents, pursue this important matter with the provincial government.

Yours sincerely,



William Holmes



George Mackie



Ying Zhou



Laura Cottle



Rose Wang

cc: Professor Santa Ono, President and Vice-Chancellor, UBC
David Eby, MLA, Vancouver-Point Grey
Richard Alexander, Chair, University Neighbourhoods Association
Michael White, Associate Vice President, Campus and Community Planning, UBC

¹ The May 23, 2016 letter was written before we learned that a small portion of our general rural property tax is considered to fund a reduction in the amount of police tax that we pay.