

HOMES NOT HATE!

Why we are marching today

On May 7th 2015 a group of homeless Indigenous women, pushed by the harassment of bylaw officers and beset by the threats of "Ridgeilantes" (Maple Ridge vigilantes), set up their tents together on the side of the road of the Cliff Avenue cul de sac. Within days they were joined by tens of other tents -- making the magnitude of the Fraser Valley homelessness and housing crisis visible to all.

The Cliff Ave tent city ended with some important (but inadequate) action that homeless people had squeezed out of the BC Liberal government: some temporary rent supplements, and a temporary homeless shelter. A bigger (though still inadequate) win came in the spring when the Province announced plans to buy the Quality Inn building on Lougheed Highway, and convert it into 61 units of supportive housing to rent at welfare rates to get people off the street and into stable homes. The Ridgeilantes mobilized, slurred the housing as an "unsupported shelter," and pushed back against the public investment in improving homeless peoples' lives. Relieved for the excuse, the BC Liberals cancelled the housing, guaranteeing those 61 potentially housed people will stay on the streets of Maple Ridge.

One year after the beginning of the Cliff Ave tent city homelessness is worse. Once the Rain City shelter closes in June, the community will be back where it started. This week the government estimates the promised new housing is five years away. We need action now!

Statement from former Cliff Ave Tent City residents

Recently over a hundred anti-homeless vigilantes held a rally to stop a social housing project in Maple Ridge. This building was going to provide housing for us. But responding to this vigilante pressure, the Province decided to cancel the project, saying they will build "more permanent" housing. But this will take more than five years to build.

What will we do until the new social housing opens? Maple Ridge's homeless shelter closes in June and new social housing is years away; where will we go in the meantime? There are no guarantees we'll still be alive if we have to wait years for housing to be built. Too many of us have already died on the street. Last year our friend Anita died two weeks before she got into social housing.

Many people who lived at the Cliff Avenue tent city are still not housed. Some people live at the shelter but the shelter is inadequate and temporary. There is no housing for us. The housing out there is too expensive and landlords discriminate against us. It's hard, if not impossible to find affordable and good housing in Maple Ridge.

The attitude toward homeless folks is really bad in Maple Ridge. We get death threats all the time. We have been chased down, we have had bottles thrown at us, we have guns pointed at us - just because we are homeless. We are people too.

We are marching for #HomesNotHate and to demand:

1. **Homes now!** We need housing right now, in Maple Ridge, our home, and a property where we can tent safely until the housing opens.
2. **Fight anti-homeless hate!** There should be zero tolerance for anti-homeless hate. When homeless people are threatened, harassed, or assaulted the police should take it seriously.
3. **Control over our homes and lives!** We want homes we govern ourselves and we want the government to work with us directly, as full members of the public.
4. **End police and bylaw harassment!** Police and bylaw officers kick us out of parks, slash apart our tents, and seize our belongings. Harassment of homeless people must end.
5. **End poverty and hunger!** There are not enough services or social supports in Maple Ridge or the Fraser Valley for low-income and homeless people. Many of us have barriers put up against accessing food banks, shelters, and health services. We need higher welfare rates, harm reduction services, and health and social services that we can all access.

We are someone's dad, mom, aunt, uncle, son and daughter. Open your eyes, mind and heart. Get to know us. Give up the grudge. Our lives matter and we deserve housing too. Walk in our shoes; the truth is many of those who say they hate us are only one paycheck away from being homeless. We love you; why do you hate us?

We're not going away and we want good, dignified housing and we also want to be able to live in tent cities without being harassed. The Cliff Avenue tent city was good, it provided safety and community. We looked after each other like family, we made our own decisions and we saved each others lives many times. We are taking a stand for homes not hate because this is our community and we are not going away.