

DATE OF MEETING December 6, 2017

AUTHORED BY JOHN HORN, SOCIAL PLANNER

SUBJECT RESPONSE TO HEALTH, SOCIAL AND SAFETY ISSUES IN THE DOWNTOWN

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide the Community Vitality Committee with information regarding proposed short, medium and long-term options in response to the current social environment in the downtown.

Recommendation

That the Community Vitality Committee receive the report for information.

BACKGROUND

At the 2017-JUN-19 Council meeting, Staff were directed to provide a range of possible responses to social and safety issues in the downtown. The current initiatives underway include an enhanced security presence in the downtown, implementation of the Urban Clean Up program, additional safe needle disposal boxes, and cross-departmental coordination. City Staff from the Bylaw, Regulation and Security Department and the Community and Cultural Planning Section conducted a series of individual interviews with business owners and employees in the downtown area to gather input on what they are experiencing with respect to safety concerns and social issues, in particular the impact of homelessness, mental health, and addictions on their daily lives.

In addition to these individual discussions that focused on identifying the issues, City Staff held three public meetings for merchants and residents in the downtown where attendees were invited to provide public input on possible responses. These meetings were attended by approximately 80 people and included a diverse range of stakeholders.

A number of issues were identified in these dialogues, including:

- an increase in the number of visibly homeless people in the community and, in particular, the downtown area;
- increased incidence of public intoxication; and,
- an increased amount of aggressive and extreme behaviours that have created anxiety and distress for residents, business owners and employees.

Staff reviewed the list of possible responses arising from the public consultation process and conferred with colleagues in the RCMP, Nanaimo Ladysmith School District, Bylaws, Sanitation, Road and Traffic, Parks, Public Works, Island Health, and local non-profit service providers. The recommended responses were reviewed by the Public Safety Committee on 2017-NOV-02.

The Public Safety Committee recommended that the top priority for action be participating in the supported modular housing initiative recently announced by BC Housing. Staff further reviewed

the priority responses and identified those that the City may be in a position to proceed with at this time. The actions identified in this report fall into three groupings: actions that are within the scope of the City and achievable in the short term; actions that require further development to determine cost and feasibility; and actions that have our community partners as the primary lead. For each recommended priority action, Staff have reviewed the timeframe for implementation and the frequency associated with each action. Estimated costs have been provided where the scope of the action is known.

Table 1 presents recommended high-priority responses where the City has primary jurisdiction, drawn from the above-referenced public engagement, consultation with community partners, and best practices in other jurisdictions.

Table 1: Recommended Response Plan – City of Nanaimo

Category of Response	Action	Cost	Timeframe	Frequency
Housing	Provide second-stage housing via BC Housing Modular Housing program	Land and DCC relief	1-12 months	One time
Public Realm / Built Environment	More frequent power washing of City Centre	\$75,000 per annum	Within 12 months	Ongoing
	Urban Clean Up initiative	\$45,000 per annum	Within 12 months	Ongoing
	Provision of 3 portable toilets in the downtown	\$405 per month	Within 12 months	Ongoing
	Additional safe syringe disposal boxes	\$2,500	Within 12 months	One time
	Additional garbage cans at key locations	Staff time (existing stock)	Within 12 months	One time
	Improved lighting	Part of LED replacement program	1-5 years	One time
Services	Provide merchants and residents with “who to call” sheet, Safe Streets Act, Surviving in Nanaimo brochures	Staff time	Within 12 months	Ongoing
	Collaborate with stakeholders in the business community to enhance the downtown	Staff time	Within 12 months	Ongoing
Security / Safety	Additional security services via contract	\$25,000	Within 12 months	Summer months
	Review permitting of 24-hour business	Staff time	Within 12 months	One time

Table 2: Proposed additional responses requiring further development

Category of Response	Action	Timeframe
Housing	Increased residential density in the downtown	1 – 10 years
Built Environment	Attract more businesses and investment to the downtown	1 – 10 years
Security / Safety	Provide RCMP foot patrol officer in the downtown	1 – 24 months
Public Realm / Built Environment	Public realm enhancements to Diana Krall Square	1 – 5 years

Table 3 presents proposed recommended responses where the City may be a partner but where the lead organization is not the local government.

Table 3: Proposed Response Plan – Partner Organizations

Category of Response	Item	Lead Organization	City's Role	Timeframe
Housing	Expansion of the adult shelter system	Emergency shelter providers	Support and advocacy; DCC relief	1 – 5 years
Services	Additional detox beds	Island Health	Support and advocacy	1 – 5 years
Services	Additional mental health supports to help individuals maintain tenancy	Non-profit sector	In-kind support and advocacy	1 – 5 years
Housing	Additional rent supplements (25 – 100 units)	BC Housing, Island Health	Advocacy	Within 12 months
Services	Provide a daytime drop in space for homeless individuals	Island Health, Non-profit sector, Service Canada	Zoning, support and advocacy, site identification	Within 18 months

Staff are seeking Council direction on the scope and scale of the City's response to social and safety concerns in the downtown. As outlined above and in Attachment A, there are a range of potential actions with associated costs and impacts.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A – Detailed Action Plan

Submitted by:

John Horn
Social Planner |

Concurrence by:

Bruce Anderson
Manager
Community and Cultural Planning |

ATTACHMENT A

RESPONSE TO HEALTH, SOCIAL AND SAFETY ISSUES IN THE DOWNTOWN Detailed Action Plan

Provide modular housing through BC Housing initiative

Staff will work with BC Housing to identify a site in Nanaimo to provide second stage housing under the Province's modular housing initiative. Further review of this short-term opportunity will be undertaken by Staff.

More frequent power washing of downtown

Currently the downtown sidewalks are power washed once every two years, staff propose doing this once yearly with several "touch up" power washing of specific high use areas such as the Commercial street sidewalk abutting the A&B Sound building. These touch ups would be done during the summer months; May through September. The increase to once yearly power washing of the entire downtown will cost \$50,000, with an additional \$25,000 available for touch ups.

Urban Clean Up initiative

The Urban Clean Up initiative consists of contracting with the Nanaimo Region John Howard Society (NRJHS) to walk through the downtown and adjacent residential areas and pick up discarded syringes, litter etc. The NRJHS staff engage clients who have been street involved and or involved in the criminal justice system and are now working to reintegrate into mainstream society.

Provision of 3 portable toilets in the downtown

One of the key issues identified by the merchants in the downtown is the incidence of public urination in doorways, alcoves and other spots. With a significant homeless population in the core it was suggested by many that the provision of toilets would perhaps go some way to alleviating this issue.

Additional safe syringe disposal boxes

Substance use patterns in our community have shifted towards increased use of opioids, with inhalation and subcutaneous injection the favoured methods. Along with this has come a marked increase in the number of discarded hypodermic syringes being discarded in the public realm. Several locations in the downtown have been identified that would benefit from the provision of a safe disposal option.

Additional garbage cans at key locations

In collaboration with staff from the Sanitation section, several spots were identified that might benefit from the provision of litter receptacles. Sanitation staff indicated they would be able to supply receptacles from existing stock and service these within existing resources.

RESPONSE TO HEALTH, SOCIAL AND SAFETY ISSUES IN THE DOWNTOWN

Detailed Action Plan

Improved lighting

Stakeholders identified that some parts of the downtown lack sufficient illumination to impart a sense of safety during evening hours. A replacement program (LED conversion) is currently underway in the downtown and is expected to address this issue over time.

Provide merchants and residents with who to call sheet, Safe Streets Act, Surviving in Nanaimo brochures

These items do not have cost implications per se, although some staff time will be required to develop and produce these informational items.

Collaborate with stakeholders in the business community to enhance the downtown

During the engagement process with downtown stakeholders some members of the business community indicated a strong desire to play a role in enhancing the cleanliness of the downtown, a role focused on the areas adjacent to their storefronts / buildings. Staff would work collaboratively with interested parties to enhance the cleanliness and visual appeal of downtown.

Additional security services via contract

This action falls under the purview of the Bylaw Department and would be sourced and managed by them.

Review permitting of 24 hour business

Some of the residents expressed that the local 7-11 convenience store on Nicol Street attracts interesting customers in the late night hours, and that this kind of traffic did not enhance people's sense of being safe downtown at night.

Provide foot patrol officer in the downtown

All those we met with on this topic praised the work of the RCMP bicycle team in addressing the key issues arising from mental health and addictions in the downtown. Stakeholders believe that an additional police presence in the form of a foot patrol by a uniformed member would be an effective addition to the current RCMP bicycle presence.

Attract more business investment and residential rental development downtown

This proposed action is substantial and could range from encouraging and supporting the private sector to building and operating market rental housing in the downtown at key locations.

Provide RCMP foot patrol presence in the downtown

This item speaks to the deployment of RCMP resources and is beyond the purview of the authors of this report, but it was mentioned frequently by downtown stakeholders.

RESPONSE TO HEALTH, SOCIAL AND SAFETY ISSUES IN THE DOWNTOWN

Detailed Action Plan

Public realm enhancements to Diana Krall Square

Staff from the Harbourfront Library and the Coastal Community Credit Union have indicated that a significant amount of antisocial activity occurs in Diana Krall Square and that it is having a big impact on customers and staff. The approach being recommended is not to try and displace homeless individuals from this space, but to invite the rest of the community to use the space more frequently by making the space more inviting to the general public. Doing so will require a consultative process and collaboration across City departments to determine what type and scale of investments would best accomplish this purpose.

Expansion of the emergency shelter system

The Salvation Army operates the men's emergency shelter (New Hope Centre) and Island Crisis Care operates the women's shelter (Samaritan House). Both these organizations have development plans in process to add square footage to their existing facilities so as to better address the demand for services they are experiencing. Support for these expansion plans from the City may entail relief of DCCs associated with the new developments, and consideration of associated rezonings.

Additional detox facilities / beds

Island Health is actively working on plans to enhance this component of the health system.

Additional mental health supports to help individuals maintain their tenancy

This is a key component of the Housing First approach being implemented by Nanaimo's Homelessness Coalition.

Additional rent supplements

With the increasing rental costs in Nanaimo individuals exiting homelessness who have small fixed incomes will find it nearly impossible to access market rental units without a financial subsidy of some kind. While the City of Nanaimo has funded a rent supplement program (to support Syrian newcomers) it is largely the Province of BC who will be most likely to provide additional rent supplements to address homelessness.

Provide a daytime drop-in space for homeless individuals

The idea of a drop-in space has been tried in Nanaimo in the past (the Living Room on Nicol street) and the lesson learned from that is the need for a substantial level of staffing to ensure the effective and safe provision of a day time option for those who do not have access to a home or other alternatives where they can go. This action item will require a multi agency collaborative model and a significant budget, with the role of the City likely being contained to site consideration and issues of zoning and land use.