

DATE OF MEETING MAY 25, 2020

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**SUBJECT SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS FOR CLEANLINESS IN PUBLIC SPACES**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To update Council regarding the impacts of social disorder on orderliness and cleanliness in public spaces, the City's response to these impacts, and to propose some short-term solutions for 2020.

### **Recommendation**

That Council fund up to \$187,000 for the provision of the City of Nanaimo "Social Disorder Response Team", from the Special Initiatives Reserve to run five days a week until 2020-DEC-31.

## **BACKGROUND**

For decades, the City of Nanaimo, like other communities of its size, has dealt with issues stemming from social disorder. Historically, costs of addressing these issues (vandalism, graffiti, illegal dumping, garbage in public spaces) were budgeted for in annual operating budgets.

Since 2016, the number of people recorded as experiencing homelessness has continued to increase dramatically. In February 2016 - 174 people, in April 2018 - 335 people, and in March 2020 - 445 people in the City were recorded as experiencing homelessness.

As public space impacts cross departments and involve multiple stakeholders, Staff have been increasingly collaborating to maximize efficiencies.

In 2017 and 2018, the City undertook additional efforts as follows:

1. Enhanced daytime security downtown;
2. Implementation of an Urban Clean-Up program with the Nanaimo Region John Howard Society;
3. Additions to daytime security services for the downtown, to bring coverage levels to 24/7;
4. The Urban Clean-Up program was expanded;
5. The addition of three portable toilets;
6. Additional needle disposal boxes and garbage cans in the downtown;

7. Addition of nighttime security in a cost-sharing agreement with School District 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith);
8. Funding for temporary seasonal workers to conduct park sweeps, needle pick up, and graffiti removal, until October 2018.

The funding provided for these initiatives ended on 2018-DEC-31. While the additional security measures and public washrooms were not continued beyond the end of 2018, the needle boxes remain and the Urban Clean-Up program continued.

On 2019-MAR-04, Staff presented the municipal response, at that time, to social issues in our community. The following impacts relating to cleanliness and security were identified.

1. Ongoing damage to public infrastructure, parks and private property;
2. The associated impacts of a reduction of public safety (real or perceived);
3. Disposal of used harm reduction supplies; and,
4. Accumulations of waste, shopping carts and graffiti.

Notwithstanding the complex causes and 'ownership' of social disorder in the community, the City is primarily responsible for maintaining orderliness and cleanliness of public spaces and providing municipal services.

The year 2019 saw continued pressure on City crews in the downtown core and throughout City parks, including:

1. Increased incidence of temporary campsites and large encampments;
2. Increased waste and stolen shopping carts on streets and in parks;
3. Changing the Wesley Street to an "urban dead zone;"
4. Presence of open-air drug market on the 400 block of Wesley Street;
5. Ongoing improper disposal of used harm reduction supplies including needles;
6. Vandalism;
7. Misuse of public washroom facilities; and,
8. Break-ins.

In 2019, a variety of internal and contracted resources were utilized in tackling the above listed issues, as detailed in Attachment A.

So far, 2020 has seen an exacerbation of the above issues. Attending to these issues is placing continuing strain on City resources. Coupled with the COVID-19 Pandemic it has never been more important for public spaces to be maintained in a sanitary fashion. To this end, staff are working with the resources they have to manage social disorder. There has been some success on Wesley Street, although maintaining the pressure on those taking part in social disorder in this area is a daily requirement. A recent pattern of increased washroom misuse has seen temporary closures of washrooms in Bowen and Maffeo Sutton Parks. Washrooms are currently operating on a reduced schedule, due to COVID-19, and custodial services to these amenities have been increased.

## **DISCUSSION**

The proposed City of Nanaimo Social Disorder Response Team (SDRT), is a collaborative approach to effectively and efficiently maintaining the orderliness and cleanliness of the City's public spaces that has been underway since November 2019. The team was initially set-up to relieve the strain of waste removal from the Bylaw Services section, and to distribute those tasks more appropriately. More recently, RCMP, Nanaimo Bylaw, Public Works and Parks have tightened collaboration, so cleaning of known hot spots occurs daily. This work places an additional burden on City resources. RCMP have refocused the bike squad from Bar Watch activities; Bylaw Services continues to spend the majority of their time on the issue, but the SDRT frees some of their time and provides a deeper clean. Resources from Public Works (two staff and vehicle) are not currently funded in the 2020 Budget. To date, funds have been diverted from the sanitation budget, but this is an unsustainable condition.

The SDRT consists of two members of staff who report to the Sanitation section, utilizing service vehicles to remove and haul the materials to the disposal facilities. The SDRT has worked Monday to Friday from 8:00am to 4:30pm. On a daily basis, the SDRT proactively services the known trouble spots to remove waste and abandoned materials. They also frequently assist in the removal of waste from active illegal encampments. Other duties include graffiti removal, litter picking, and needle collection and disposal. The team has worked closely with Bylaw services to address the most pressing encampments that are the largest and most visible and having impacts on neighbourhoods, parks and riparian areas, as in Attachment B.

Since March 2020, and as a result of pandemic prevention measures, many downtown businesses are closed and boarded-up, leaving streets and parking lots empty and vulnerable to an increasingly ostensible presence of homeless and transient individuals. This situation has created significant demand for Police and Bylaw Services presence to protect private property and public infrastructure around downtown and more waste and abandoned items collection and cleaning activities by SDRT. In order to properly address the cleaning needs, SDRT has expanded its support by starting its operations at 7:00am, also mechanically sweeping the downtown area from 7:00am to 9:00am, Monday to Friday.

Bylaw Services still spend most of their day on these issues (In 2019 Bylaw Officers' collected 404 shopping carts off the streets, the number has increased to 225 shopping carts in the first four months of 2020). Increased collaborative SDRT activities have considerably reduced Bylaw Officers' time spent on collecting and disposing of waste. It has also increased the level of cleanliness of the downtown area.

For this service to continue, Staff propose to formalize the funding required to account the cost that occurs to continue SDRT services, (except for budgeted Street Sweeping), in the 2020 Budget (Option 1). |

## Financial Implications

### Services and Activities Diverted to Social Disorder Response

Operational Activities	2020 Budgeted Service Time	Estimated Service Time Diverted to Social Disorder Response	2020 Social Disorder Response Cost Estimate	Notes
Scheduled street, sidewalk sweeping	80 Hrs/week	10 Hrs/week	\$40,000	
Public Land Cleanup (Illegal Dumping)	As needed	As needed	\$13,000	Estimate 50% of budget to be used for Social Disorder Response.
Vandalism/Graffiti removal by Parks/Public Works	As needed and contract	70%	\$115,000	Estimated 50% of Public Works budget and 70% of Parks budget.
Bylaw Enforcement Officers	160 Hrs/week	80 Hrs/week	\$193,500	Wages only. Estimate 50% of 4 officers' time for Social Disorder. Typical last 4 years. BEO work 40 hr. weeks effective 2020 from 35 hrs.
Parking Enforcement Officers	240 Hrs/week	168 Hrs/week	\$389,500	Wages only. Estimate 70% of 6 officers' time to Social Disorder. Typical last 4 years. BEO work 40 hr. weeks effective 2020 from 35 hrs.
RCMP Bike Squad	N/A	Part of mandate	\$168,000	RCMP Bike Squad responds to Social Disorder as part of mandate. 2019 and 2020 Social Disorder Response cost is an estimate for this service. Estimate 4 members spend 2 hours a day.
<b>Public Land Social Disorder Response Team Cleaning Activities</b>	<b>Currently not budgeted</b>	<b>80 Hrs/week effective March 15th</b>	<b>\$187,000</b>	<b>Estimated cost for 2020 provided by SDRT Cost Analysis totals \$187,000. Cost incurred in 2019 during November and December were on an as needed basis and estimated to be \$30,000.</b>

Funding for the Social Disorder Response Team (SDRT) is currently not included in the 2020 – 2024 Financial Plan.

If Council chooses to fund the SDRT, possible funding sources are:

### **Special Initiatives Reserve**

From the 2019 surplus, \$2,955,073 was put into the Special Initiatives Reserve. The SDRT could be funded from this source. However, this would leave less money to fund the any shortfall resulting from the COVID-19 Pandemic. Staff suggest that with the uncertain financial picture in 2020, that Council earmark up to \$187,000 from the Special Initiatives Reserve. Pending reconciliation of labour charges as a result of Staff redeployments, the amount may be less. \$187,000 represents the full cost of the service.

### **Strategic Initiatives Reserve**

Currently, there are sufficient funds in the reserve in 2020 to cover the costs of the SDRT. The funding sources of this reserve are Casino and Fortis revenues. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the City will likely see a shortfall of funding from Casino revenues as casino's have been ordered to close as a result of the Province of BC Health Emergency Order. At this time, we are uncertain as to what amount of revenue will flow into the reserve in 2020 and 2021. This could result in less funding for Council initiatives in the future.

### **OPTIONS**

1. That Council fund up to \$187,000 for the provision of the City of Nanaimo "Social Disorder Response Team", from the Special Initiatives Reserve, to run five days a week until 2020-DEC-31.
  - The advantages of this option are:  
A dedicated Social Disorder Response Team is able to tackle the waste in streets and parks on a consistent and proactive basis.  
This service increases the cleanliness of our public spaces in downtown and parks and prevents accumulations of waste and the growth of major encampments.  
The SDRT takes the strain of waste removal away from Bylaw Officer's allowing them to concentrate on more appropriate tasks.
  - The disadvantages of this option are:  
The cost of this service is not currently incorporated into the 2020 operational budget.  
Reduced two hours per day street sweeping activities will have an impact on the level of cleanliness on other areas around the City.
  - Financial Implications:  
The total budget for the SDRT program from 2020-MAR-15 to 2020-DEC-31 is \$187,000.
2. That Council provide alternative direction to Staff.

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- Social disorder continues to have a negative impact on orderliness and cleanliness in public spaces in Nanaimo.
- The creation of a City of Nanaimo Social Disorder Response Team has proved effective in cleaning up encampments and waste from public areas.
- A more comprehensive plan and budget will be set forth in 2021.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A - Overview of Council Support to Date Relating to Social Disorder and Public Area Cleanliness

Attachment B - 2019 Approach to Social Disorder

Attachment C - Social Disorder Response Team Hot Spot List |

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