

Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING June 22, 2020

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SUBJECT PLAN TO RESTORE OLD CITY QUARTER SECURITY AND PRIDE OF PLACE

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with a framework and funding strategy for restoring security in the Old City Quarter and seek direction on a preferred option.

Recommendation

That Council provide direction with respect to a framework and funding strategy for restoring security in the Old City Quarter.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, safety and security in the downtown core was top of mind for Council and the general public. The 2019-2022 Strategic Plan (amended 2020-MAR-02) includes a commitment to proactively address social disorder issues, enhance public safety, and advocate for support to ensure our community is a safe place for all residents. Specific actions include working with the RCMP, Bylaw Services, and community and neighbourhood block watch programs to reduce social disorder issues and enhance public safety.

Property owners and businesses in the Old City Quarter (OCQ) were struggling with public disorder issues prior to March 2020. The situation has grown worse during the pandemic. Several of the property owners have hired private security to protect their property, City Bylaw Officers have been redeployed to address social disorder issues, and the RCMP Bike Squad have increased their presence in the downtown.

A group of property owners from the OCQ provided a letter to Council on 2020-MAY-19 outlining their concerns about security in their neighbourhood and presented a possible solution outlined in a Terms of Reference (Attachment A).

The letter was received by Council at the 2020-MAY-25 Regular Council meeting, with the resulting motion:

“That Staff work with the Old City Quarter Business Improvement Association and the Old City Quarter Health and Safety Alliance to develop a framework and funding strategy for restoring security in the Old City Quarter and that Staff prepare a report for Council.”

The motion carried unanimously.

Staff met with representatives of the OCQ on 2020-JUN-02 to discuss the proposed framework and discuss funding options.

Proposed Framework

The program envisioned by the OCQ property owners includes the following:

- Duration: 2020-JUN-15 to 2020-DEC-31 (pilot project);
- Area: Old City Quarter as defined by the Business Improvement Association (BIA);
- Security: Three evening safety officers would patrol the neighbourhood from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m., seven days a week;
- Clean Up of Public/Private Property: The OCQ will contract with the John Howard Society to provide an on-call clean-up service for public and private property within the OCQ;
- Ambassadors: Summer students would be hired to play an ambassador role and help re-establish street activity;
- Helpline: The OCQ would establish a “helpline” for residents of the OCQ to call and report safety concerns, or for removal of debris on private or public property. Calls received relating to security from the helpline would be sent to the RCMP or Bylaw Services and would be addressed in context of other City commitments. The Helpline – Lines of Communication is presented in Attachment C. The helpline would record and document incidents that would provide data to inform future decision making around resourcing for the neighbourhood.
- Monthly Reviews: The OCQ will meet with Bylaw Services and the RCMP on a monthly basis to review the program and adjust service levels.

Funding Strategy

The budget (Attachment B) for the proposed pilot project is \$195,000. The OCQ proposes the costs be split 30% by the property owners, with the City providing the remaining 70% as a one-time grant of \$136,500.

Funding for the pilot program could come from Council’s Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund. This reserve fund receives annual contributions from Casino and Fortis revenues. With the COVID-19 pandemic, it is uncertain what funds will be received in 2020 and the foreseeable future. The opening balance at 2020-JAN-01 of the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund was \$3,090,982 and has \$2,369,869 in commitments for 2020. Therefore, approximately \$721,113 is available to fund this program.

A letter of support for the initiative has been provided by the Old City Quarter Health and Safety Alliance Initiative (Attachment D).

DISCUSSION

There are a number of broader issues Council needs to consider in supporting the OCQ Initiative.

Broader Safety Issues in the Downtown Core

The pilot program, as presented, would focus on the OCQ. Other areas of the downtown face similar challenges and could benefit from additional security, including properties on Commercial Street, Front Street, and Victoria Crescent.

Existing Security Services in Downtown Core

The City currently contracts with Footprints Security to provide security in the downtown core. The security is focused on the Harbourfront, Vancouver Island Conference Centre, and Bastion Street Parkades. This contract provides security from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., seven days a week. The total cost to the City for this level of security in 2019 was \$138,778.

In addition, private landowners are paying for security of their premises, such as the Coast Hotel, Nanaimo Port Authority, and Coastal Community Credit Union. There may be an opportunity to coordinate the downtown security patrols to reduce the overall costs.

Increased Investment by Council in Police and Bylaw Staff

Council has allocated resources for three new RCMP officers in 2020. In total, 148 RCMP officers are assigned to the City of Nanaimo. The Bike Squad has a team of eight officers dedicated to the downtown core. Council employs ten bylaw officers to enforce City regulations. In the long run, Council may wish to invest in additional police or bylaw enforcement resources to help address the concerns of the OCQ property owners.

Recent Council Investments in Cleaning

At the 2020-MAY-25 Council meeting, Council received a presentation on the Social Disorder Response Team. This is a coordinated effort with Staff from Public Works, Bylaw Services, and Facility and Parks Operations, providing a timely clean-up service for abandoned homeless camps and refuse left on City rights-of-way. Council has allocated \$187,000 to fund the Social Disorder Response Team (five days a week) through 2020-DEC-31. The City also contracts through a grant in the amount of \$45,000 with the John Howard Society to provide clean-up services in the downtown core.

Next Steps

The program presented by the OCQ is a pilot project ending 2020-DEC-31. If there is a desire by Council to extend the program into 2021, Staff would need to evaluate other models. One option is to introduce a Business Improvement Association levy that is only applied to commercial properties. Another option is to investigate if a Local Service Area bylaw is viable. Details on these options will be brought to Council in the fall of 2020 for consideration if Council decided to advance the OCQ pilot project.

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct Staff to work with the Old City Quarter Business Improvement Association to implement a pilot program for additional security and cleaning in the Old City Quarter until 2020-DEC-31.
 - Advantages: The OCQ pilot project would be managed by the Old City Quarter Business Improvement Association and would not require additional Staff resources. The program includes a partial cost share from some of the property owners in the business improvement area. The program could be operationalized quickly. The

- approach outlined by the OCQ provides a holistic neighbourhood approach to addressing safety and cleanliness on both public and private land.
- **Disadvantages:** As a pilot program, there would be a need to evaluate the success of the program in the fall of 2020 to determine if it would be continued, renewed, or revised for 2021. Once the program is established, there may be an expectation that the level of service continue. Council may also receive concerns the program is focused strictly on the OCQ and not the wider downtown or other neighbourhoods in the city experiencing security challenges.
 - **Financial Implications:** The pilot project is expected to cost \$195,000, with the City contributing a one-time grant of \$136,500 to the Old City Quarter Business Improvement Association. The funding would be drawn from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund.
2. That Council direct Staff to increase the existing budget for nighttime security in the downtown core until 2020-DEC-31.
- **Advantages:** The existing contract for nighttime security in the City-owned parkades would be expanded to include the broader downtown. This could be implemented in a timely manner using the existing security contract.
 - **Disadvantages:** Expanding the program to the entire downtown will increase the City's security costs. The program would focus on public lands, and not private property. The program would not include the helpline, additional cleaning, and the ambassador program proposed by the OCQ. The OCQ could fund these separately.
 - **Financial Implications:** The City is currently paying \$138,778 per annum for downtown security. Two additional security officers working from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. would cost an additional \$83,200 until 2020-DEC-31. The funding would be drawn from the Strategic Infrastructure Reserve Fund.
3. That Council direct Staff to continue to provide the same level of security and cleaning for the downtown core.
- **Advantages:** The City is already spending \$138,778 on nighttime security in the downtown core. Council recently invested an additional \$187,000 for the Social Disorder Response Team. In addition, the City contracts with the John Howard Society for clean up in the downtown and City parks for \$45,000 per annum. Not participating in the pilot program would enable Council to preserve resources.
 - **Disadvantages:** A number of property owners are concerned about safety in the downtown core and are anxious to find a solution. Not moving forward with an option may be viewed negatively by some members of the public.
 - **Financial Implications:** There would be no additional financial costs to the City by following this option.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The COVID-19 pandemic that started in March of 2020 has negatively impacted the downtown core of Nanaimo.
- Prior to the pandemic, safety and security in the downtown core was top of mind for Council and the general public. Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan notes a commitment to public safety.
- A group of property owners from the Old City Quarter wrote to Council on 2020-MAY-19 requesting help from the City in restoring security and pride of place in their downtown neighbourhood.
- Council directed Staff at the 2020-MAY-25 meeting to return with a Staff report outlining a framework and funding strategy to restore security and pride of place in the Old City Quarter.
- The proposed pilot program would include the introduction of private security patrols working from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. to protect property, a central helpline for residents/businesses to call to report concerns, a summer ambassador program, and enhanced cleaning services provided through the John Howard Society during the day.
- Costs for the pilot program, which would operate until 2020-DEC-31, are estimated to be \$195,000, with the City providing a one-time grant of \$136,500 to the Old City Quarter Business Improvement Association to manage the project.
- The program, if approved by Council, could be implemented in a timely manner.
- Council should be cognizant that approval of an enhanced level of service in one area of the downtown core may require the program to be expanded more broadly.
- Other options for Council's consideration include increasing funding for just nighttime security in the downtown core, or continuing to operate at the current level of service.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: 2020-MAY-19 Letter to Mayor and Council from OCQ
ATTACHMENT B: OCQ Security & Pride of Neighbourhood Pilot Budget 2020-JUN-03
ATTACHMENT C: OCQ Lines of Communication & Response diagram
ATTACHMENT D: Letter dated 2020-JUN-01 from the Old City Quarter Health and Safety Alliance Initiative

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