

DATE OF MEETING | APRIL 20, 2022 |

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/ DEPUTY CAO |

SUBJECT DOWNTOWN NANAIMO SAFETY ACTION PLAN

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To provide Council with the financial implications of the Downtown Nanaimo Safety Action Plan and to seek direction with respect the implementation of the Plan's recommendations. |

Recommendation

That the Finance and Audit Committee provide direction with respect to the implementation of the Downtown Nanaimo Safety Action Plan.

BACKGROUND

In recognition of the ongoing challenges with social disorder in the downtown, Council had previously allocated funds to complete a Safety and Security Review of the City Core.

Neilson Strategies has been engaged to complete this work and over recent months, has been meeting with local stakeholders and reviewing approaches taken by other communities who are experiencing similar challenges.

On the agenda for 2022-APR-20, the Finance and Audit Committee will be receiving the consultant's recommendations of the Downtown Nanaimo Safety Action Plan with a full report to be forthcoming. |

DISCUSSION

Previous Safety and Security Investments

The following is a summary of the recent history of Safety and Security investments in the downtown core.

The Community Policing and Services Office (CPSO)

The RCMP's downtown community policing office was moved from Wharf Street to Victoria Crescent in 2007 at the recommendation of the SAFER Working Group in order to coordinate public safety efforts in the area. Over the next five years, RCMP Community Policing; Downtown Bylaw and Parking Services; the Citizens on Patrol program; an ambassador program; and coordinated day and night time private security patrols; all worked out of this office.

Services administered out of the CPSO declined over the next five years as conditions in the neighbourhood improved. The downtown ambassador program, operated through Service Canada funding, was discontinued when the grant expired. The community policing officer position assigned to the CPSO was re-assigned to the School Liaison Program, which led to the departure of police-based community volunteer programs, and the City discontinued funding for daytime downtown private security patrols.

The CPSO was closed in 2019 when it was recognized that the City's Parking Clerk often worked alone in the office throughout the day while the downtown bylaw officers were out working in the community. There were several incidents where agitated individuals entered the office and threatened the clerk, necessitating the door to be locked with public access granted on a case-by-case basis. Without a police presence since 2012, the downtown-based bylaw officers were relocated to the Service and Resource Centre (SARC).

Community Connect Program

In June 2020, Staff provided Council with a framework and funding strategy for restoring security in the Old City Quarter (OCQ). The report identified that property owners and businesses in the OCQ were struggling with public disorder issues associated to the Wesley Street encampment, heightened by the Pandemic. A group of OCQ property owners proposed a pilot project to increase the use of private security patrols in the neighbourhood between 10pm to 6am seven days a week, supported by an on-call clean up service for public and private property provided by the John Howard Society and supplemented by summer student "Ambassadors" hired to help to re-establish street activity. The project was budgeted at \$195,000 for six months, funded 30% by the property owners and 70% by the City (as a one-time grant of \$136,500). The program was subsequently renewed for an additional six months at a 20% funding by the property owners and 80% by the City. This provided funding for additional security patrols and clean-up to the end of June 2021 (additional City Grant of \$147,000).

Following the completion of the Community Connect program in mid-2021, Council elected to augment existing private security in the downtown for the remainder of that year. The intent of this funding was to create additional capacity to provide security during overnight hours throughout the downtown. As a result of this decision, a one-time allocation of \$400,000 was added to the existing annual private security budget of approximately \$145,000. Subsequently, the City was successful in securing a grant which covered these costs (Strengthening Communities Grant). As such, the 2021 allocation was carried over and the original \$400,000 remains within the downtown security budget in 2022. The full deployment of the enhance security that was anticipated through this additional funding has not been achieved as the City's Private Security Contractor has been unable to fully staff these additional positions.

Existing Safety and Security Services

RCMP Bike Patrol

In addition to regular RCMP support, the Nanaimo Detachment has deployed police officers on bicycles in and around downtown since the 1990s. Over time, the Bike Patrol increased from four to eight officers. These officers are police specialists in dealing with homelessness and inner-city urban issues. They are very familiar with people who live on the street, and well-aligned with the community's health, shelter, and outreach services. As part of the 2022 budget, Council

supported the addition of four RCMP Officers (\$488,000 with an April 1st start date) with the understanding that these positions would be used initially to support the downtown. At the time of this report, these additional positions have yet to be filled. In addition to the additional four officers included in 2022 Council had previously approved the addition of 15 new RCMP officers over five years starting in 2020. As such additional RCMP resources have been added or are committed as follows:

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
New officers approved in 2020	3	3	3	3	3	15
Additional officers to support downtown			4			4
Total	3	3	7	3	3	19

Bylaw Officers

At present, the City has 12 Bylaw Officers who are responsible for bylaw enforcement across the community. Although these officers are tasked with general enforcement of all City bylaws, in recent years, a significant portion of their time has been dedicated to addressing the downstream impacts of mental health, addiction, and homelessness in the Community. Although these impacts are felt across the City, the largest concentration remain in and around the downtown core. As with the RCMP, the Bylaw Officers are familiar with people who live on the street, and are well-aligned with the community's health, shelter, and outreach services. In 2020, Council supported the transition of officers from a 35-hour work week to a 40-hour week.

Private Security

In addition the private security that is funded by the City, there are numerous private businesses and properties that have engaged their own private security. Although Council has provided resources to obtain additional security, the City's contractor has had problems providing the requested staff and as a result, the majority of the City's downtown security patrols have been forced to remain in and around the parkades.

The Downtown Nanaimo Safety Action Plan

The Downtown Safety Action Plan is a long term plan with immediate pragmatic actions designed to:

- make Downtown Nanaimo and surrounding areas safe for residents, visitors, businesses, and persons in need;
- achieve a tangible decrease in public disorder in Downtown Nanaimo and surrounding areas;
- improve the perception of Downtown Nanaimo as a place to live, visit, and operate a business;
- anticipated and address the needs of businesses in Downtown Nanaimo so that the businesses can thrive;
- ensure that persons in need feel treated with compassion, respect, and dignity, and receive assistance in connecting with available community services;

- complement the efforts of the Systems Planning Organization and individual community service agencies aimed at helping to address the health (broadly defined) and housing needs of vulnerable populations, as well as the myriad of root causes that place people in situations of need.

The Plans recommendations include a variety of new and augmented programs, services and initiatives to meet these goals including:

- 12 Community Safety Officers (CSOs)
- 2 Permanent Community Clean Teams
- 4 Parks Ambassadors (2022 only)
- A Vandalism Relief Grant
- Additional Downtown Parkade Cleaning
- A Downtown Ambassador Program
- Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments of Public Spaces

Of note, the recommendations do not include additional RCMP officers beyond those previously committed by Council. At present the filling of existing funded RCMP positions remains a challenge and as noted above the additional four positions that were originally budgeted for an April 2022 start have not been filled.

In recognition of the existing challenges in staffing across the organization and the significant work required to fully implement the plan, Staff have prepared two options for the Committee's consideration including a phased implementation over 2022 and 2023 or a full implementation in 2022. If the Committee, and ultimately Council, elects to proceed with the recommendations of the Downtown Nanaimo Safety Action Plan, Staff will work to expedite the implementation of the plan including the establishment of CSOs. While the two options provided by Staff will have budget implications for 2022 and 2023 both options will result in similar full implementation dates given the time estimated to fully implement the plan recommendations including the hiring and training of CSOs. |

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

| The annual operating cost of the fully implemented plan is currently estimated at approximately \$2.5 Million. Additional start up costs have been budgeted in 2022 and 2023.

As noted above Staff have prepared two implementation options for the Committee's consideration. The detailed budgets for both options are included as Attachment A. |

OPTIONS

1. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council add a phased approach to Downtown Safety Action Plan to the 2022-2026 Financial Plan effective 2022-JUL-01.
 - The advantages of this option: This option provides sufficient resources to fully implement the recommendations of the plan over 2022 and 2023.
 - The disadvantages of this option: None identified.
 - Financial Implications: The overall impact to the 2022-2026 Financial Plan will be a 0.7% tax increase in 2022 and 1.2% in 2023.

2. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council add full implementation of the Downtown Safety Action Plan to the 2022-2026 Financial Plan effective 2022- JUL- 01.
 - The advantages of this option: This options provides clear commitment to proceed with the implementation of the Downtown Nanaimo Safety Action Plan as soon as practical.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The implementation of the plan and specifically the hiring and training of 12 new CSOs is estimated to take a number of months to complete and it is likely that that there will be an overall surplus at the end of 2022.
 - Financial Implications: The overall impact on the 2022-2026 Financial Plan will be a 0.9% tax increase in 2022 and 1% in 2023.

3. That the Finance and Audit Committee recommend that Council maintain current resourcing levels for the 2022-2026 Financial Plan.
 - The advantages of this option: None identified.
 - The disadvantages of this option: The Downtown area will continue to struggle with ongoing challenges with social disorder and the downstream impacts of mental health, addiction, and homelessness.
 - Financial Implications: No changes required to current budgets. |

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Downtown Safety Plan and Security Review has been completed.
- Recommendations from the review are projected to cost \$2.5 million annually.
- Implementation of the recommendations would be over 2022 and 2023.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Downtown Safety Action Plan Costing |

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