

DATE OF MEETING MARCH 27, 2023  
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SUBJECT COMMUNITY SAFETY AND SECURITY

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To provide the Governance and Priorities Committee with an update of City of Nanaimo initiatives and programs working to address community safety and security.

## **BACKGROUND**

The City of Nanaimo provides safety and security through emergency response services such as fire, bylaw, and policing. In addition, the City has an important impact on some of the root causes of crime and social disorder through its influence on the design of the built environment, provision of community amenities (buildings, parks, etc.), and programs/initiatives that support social development, recreation, culture, and wellness. This report focusses on City programming and initiatives related to community safety and security as organized under following categories:

- *Downstream:* Downstream approaches to community safety and security focus on the City's ability to respond to emergencies and requires an immediate response to stop harms, minimize victimization, and hold individuals accountable. This is reflected in the work of the City's Bylaw Enforcement Section, Fire Rescue Department, Emergency Management Program, and Police Services Department through the Nanaimo RCMP.
- *Midstream:* Midstream approaches to community safety and security incorporate prevention and risk intervention strategies. Midstream approaches help to support the City's most marginalized populations and work to reduce and respond to acutely elevated risk situations to mitigate harm and decrease the likelihood of victimization and trauma. Some examples of midstream approaches includes the work of the City's Situation Table and the Youth Wellness Centre supported by the City's Parks, Recreation and Culture Department in partnership with Island Health.
- *Upstream:* Upstream approaches to safety and security are about creating a healthy, safe and secure community where everyone has opportunities to grow, work, play, be valued, and have belonging. Upstream approaches work to provide equitable and enhanced access to protective factors and the social determinants of health<sup>1</sup> not only for marginalized populations but for the general population as well. Some examples include

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<sup>1</sup> A protective factor is defined as a positive influence that can improve the lives of individuals or the safety of the community. Protective factors are characteristics at the individual, family, community and societal levels that are associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes related to violence, crime or victimization. Protective factors at the community and societal levels are directly related to the social determinants of health such as equitable access to income, education, employment, early childhood development, food security, housing, social connectedness, health system, etc.

the City's work on affordable housing, the efforts to create social connectedness through Parks, Recreation, and Culture programs, and supporting neighbourhoods through the Neighbourhood Association Supports Policy. The implementation of City Plan is also an upstream initiative as the goals and policies of City Plan are intended to create a healthy, resilient Nanaimo that cares for the wellbeing of all our residents.

Below is a summary of some of the City's community safety and security programs and initiatives. These include those that are funded through regular Council budget allocations and others that are supported by external funding including grants. Council can refer to City Plan's Integrated Action Plan for further programs and initiatives related to community safety and security. |

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Downstream Initiatives and Programs**

#### *Strengthening Communities Services Program (Round One and Two)*

The Strengthening Communities' Services Program (SCSP) is a shared funding program provided by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to support unsheltered populations and to address related community impacts including safety concerns. In July 2021, the City was awarded \$2.5 million and in July 2022, the City received a second round of funding and was awarded \$625,000.

Downstream programs funded by SCSP Round One included supporting the City's shower program, the expansion of downtown clean up and security programs, and providing portable toilets in key locations. Round Two funding supports a morning meal program, extreme weather and general daytime warming services, and homelessness outreach services that include providing health, food, and cultural supports for Snuneymuxw community members experiencing homelessness.

Between December 2022 and February 2023, Risebridge Society and the 7-10 Club Society at St. Paul's Anglican Church provided daytime general warming services with SCSP funds. Risebridge served an average of 55 individuals daily and the 7-10 Club Society served an average of 59 individuals daily. The Unitarian Shelter is funded to operate daytime extreme cold weather services for existing shelter guests when weather forecasts are predicting snow, wind or rain with temperatures at 3° Celsius or lower and when forecasted temperatures are 0° Celsius or lower. Between December 2022 and February 2023, the Unitarian Shelter provided services for an average of 18 existing shelter guests daily during extreme cold weather events. From November 2022 to January 2023, the Salvation Army provided 6,206 breakfast meals with SCSP funding.

#### *Extreme Weather Response*

Through collaborative work between staff within the City's Community Development, Emergency Management, Parks, Recreation & Culture, Bylaw, and Fire Rescue Departments along with community partners, Risebridge Society, 7-10 Club Society, and the Unitarian Shelter, the City was able to provide supports and services to individuals experiencing homelessness during extreme weather events. Utilizing SCSP grant funds and Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness (EMCR) funds, the City has been able to fund two general daytime warming centres and one extreme cold daytime warming centre from December 2022 to March 2023 and provide overnight warming services during three extreme cold weather events in December 2022, January 2023 and February 2023. A total of \$332,078 of funding has been coordinated and

distributed by the City to provide extreme weather response between December 2022 and February 2023.

### *Shower Program*

In 2018, the City started funding a shower program in partnership with the First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo to supplement the limited shower services available through other local shelter and social service providers. For 2023, the City is providing \$69,800 to provide shower services for individuals experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness five days per week at Caledonia Park (110 Wall Street). A total of \$206,015 of funding has been provided since the program was established. First Unitarian staff as well as other service providers also provide access to additional resources such as food and other basic need supplies during shower program operating hours.

### *Urban Clean-Up Program*

Between 2017 and 2022, the City provided \$246,860 to fund an urban clean up program. The program was developed in response to concerns voiced by downtown residents and businesses about the impacts that social issues were having on the urban areas of the City, this included garbage and discarded needles. The City funded the John Howard Society to operate the program. In addition to providing clean up services, the program provided some day-to-day employment opportunities for clients leaving correctional facilities. The program operated Monday to Friday for 7 hours a day with one paid staff member supporting two clients with honoraria. The program ended in December 2022 by request of the operator due to other more desirable employment programs for clients and the inability to address the increase of large volumes of debris requiring vehicle transportation for removal.

### *Surviving in Nanaimo Guide*

The Surviving in Nanaimo Guide (SIN) is a brochure created and updated annually by Staff. The guide provides information about low-cost or free services and resources available for individuals and families who are struggling to access services around shelters, housing, food, mental health and substance use services, legal aid, and other social supports. The guide is well used by non-profit organizations for sharing information with their clients. The guide is online and the City also provides hard copies of these guides upon request to service providers, and in addition to staff time, the City spends approximately \$2,500 annually on printing and distributing the guides.

### *Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan*

The Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan developed in 2022 provides a coordinated approach to community safety and provides additional supports to the ongoing challenges with social disorder downtown. The plan recommended hiring 12 Community Safety Officers; adding two community Clean Teams; the creation of a Downtown Ambassador Program; additional downtown parkade cleaning; Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments of City-owned spaces; and the creation of a Vandalism Relief Grant to support downtown businesses with the ongoing costs of graffiti and vandalism. The City has committed \$2.5 million annually to implement the plan to increase community safety in the downtown core. An update on the implementation of the Downtown Safety Plan will be presented at the 2023-MAR-27 Governance and Priorities Committee meeting.

### *Nanaimo Fire Rescue*

Nanaimo Fire Rescue (NFR) endeavours to strengthen community safety and security through a comprehensive approach, both preventative and response oriented. From a response perspective, NFR is an all-hazards organization that responded to nearly 10,000 incidents in 2022, including fires, hazardous materials emergencies, technical rescues, vehicle accidents, and medical incidents. To support these activities, NFR continuously trains firefighters to an Emergency Medical Responder level and is one of a very limited group of fire departments to train to this high standard. In addition, NFR has collaborated with the BC Centre for Disease Control's Harm Reduction Services "Take Home Naloxone" distribution program, and is one of the first fire departments in British Columbia to pilot this initiative. To ensure a timely and appropriately resourced response to emergency incidents, NFR has completed a Strategic Master Plan ensuring that fire department resources match community growth. As a result, 40 new firefighters are being implemented in two phases, 20 firefighters in 2023 and 20 firefighters in 2025.

### *Police Services (RCMP)*

As part of the 2022 budget, Council supported the addition of four RCMP officers by providing an additional \$488,000 to the City's regular budget for police services. These four officers, referred to as downtown enforcement officers, are foot patrol positions meant to support the downtown core dealing with homelessness and inner city urban issues. In addition to the four officers included in 2022, Council previously approved the addition of 15 new RCMP officers over five years starting in 2020, with the addition of three new officers each year. These enhancements are in addition to the existing RCMP Bike Patrol Unit. Police officers on bicycles patrol, and provide support services in and around downtown. This unit provides eight well-trained officers who are specialists in dealing with homelessness and social disorder. They are very familiar with people experiencing homelessness and connect on a regular basis with the community's health, shelter, and outreach services.

## **Midstream Initiatives and Programs**

### *Health and Housing Action Plan*

The Health and Housing Action Plan (HHAP) provides a five-year road map and a coordinated response to support the needs of those at risk of, or facing the most vulnerable circumstances, meet their health and housing needs. Providing housing, social, and health supports to people experiencing homelessness supports the reduction of crime and victimization. A newly established Systems Planning Organization (SPO) will help to implement the HHAP by providing research, data, analysis, education, and coordination to improve the community's response to addressing health and housing challenges in order to help end homelessness. The City has committed \$500,000 annually for five years to support the work of the SPO.

### *Community Policing Program*

The Community Policing Program is a City funded program delivered in partnership with the Nanaimo RCMP. The program provides a broad range of community-based crime prevention and community policing initiatives. The purpose of this program is to encourage the community to become involved through volunteer opportunities in crime prevention and crime reduction. Programs offered through Community Policing include Neighbourhood Safety Audits, Speed Watch, Block Watch, Crime Watch, 529 Garage Bike Registry, and other

additional safety education and awareness campaigns and events. In 2023, the City provided \$129,974 for the Community Policing Program and \$19,821 of SCSP funding was provided to lease a second vehicle to enhance the Crime Watch program in local neighbourhoods.

#### *Strengthening Communities Services Program (Round One and Two)*

In addition to the previously mentioned programs, the SCSP Round One funding has allowed the City to fund 12 temporary studio housing units and six scattered site-housing units (until summer 2023) for Snuneymuxw community members experiencing homelessness along with providing capacity funding for management of the units with a range of health supports. Through Round Two and as mentioned previously, the City is also funding the lease of a second vehicle for the Community Policing Program to provide additional Crime Watch Patrols in City neighbourhoods for one year until summer 2023.

#### *Nanaimo's Situation Table*

In 2021, the provincial government, through the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, provided the City \$30,000 to support the creation of the Nanaimo Situation Table. The funding allowed the City to access training modules to onboard participants to the Situation Table framework. The City provides staff resources for the Situation Table to provide support and access to the training modules, to coordinate and facilitate the Situation Table meetings and to collect risk factor data specific to Nanaimo. In partnership with community agencies, the City launched Nanaimo's Situation Table on 2023-JAN-31.

A Situation Table is a proactive hub that brings together people engaged in health, social services, and public safety so that they can respond rapidly and effectively to a vulnerable person or family in a high-risk situation who needs to be connected quickly to services and supports. These high-risk situations could be victimization, overdose, eviction, offending behaviour, and others that, without immediate supports offered, would become more negative, traumatic, and even life threatening.

Supports offered by a Situation Table framework allows individuals and families to be connected quickly to social and safety services, usually within 24-48 hours. By responding to critical and urgent circumstances, a Situation Table improves not only the life of an individual/family in crisis but also positively affects public safety, providing a level of protection when people who are referred to the table draw heavily on multiple resources and/or become challenging to local businesses and the community.

### **Upstream Initiatives and Programs**

#### *Parks, Recreation and Culture Programs*

Links between community involvement in parks, recreation and culture programs are associated with lower levels of crime and vandalism. The City's Parks, Recreation and Culture Division (PRC) provides safe gathering spaces and programs and events for families, social groups as well as individuals of all ages, demographics and economic status, regardless of their ability to pay for access. The City provides free family activities through special events like Family Day, Concerts in the Park, Truth and Reconciliation Day, and other free programs at various City parks and facilities. The Leisure Economic Access Pass (LEAP) also supports families in need to access drop-in swimming and skating sessions and provides a discount to registered programs. PRC also provides specific programming to support healthy child and youth development. For

example, PRC Staff support youth through the Leaders in Training Program, a Youth Lounge drop-in at the Nanaimo Aquatic Centre, the Spare Blox drop-in program, and various youth week events and activities. These programs provide youth, especially youth at higher risk, the opportunity to be engaged in positive activity and the ability to be connected with specially trained PRC Staff that can provide mentorship and can act as navigators connecting youth and children to other much needed services in the community.

### *Affordable Housing Initiatives*

City Plan and the Affordable Housing Strategy (AHS) provides a framework for the City to work with other levels of government, the private sector, and non-profit organizations to facilitate the development of affordable housing. The City has implemented a number of initiatives including establishing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with BC Housing to build supportive and affordable housing units, the creation and implementation of short-term rental regulations, an update to the Community Amenity Contribution to allow more financial supports for affordable housing, and the launch of Nanaimo's first Rent Bank. In addition, through the MOU with BC Housing, the City has provided land for a number of supportive and affordable housing projects. Staff are working on additional affordable housing initiatives (as prioritized by Council on 2022-SEP-26) that will be presented to Council in the spring and fall of 2023. Affordable housing contributes to community safety by providing a safe and stable environment for individuals and families and lowers the risk of becoming homeless.

### *Social Planning Grants*

Each year the City provides \$85,000 to fund the Social Planning Grant Program, which provides grants under two streams, Social Response (\$60,000) and Community Vitality (\$25,000). The purpose of the grant program is to assist organizations in responding to issues of a social nature with initiatives that enhance social cohesion, address the root causes and effects of poverty, contribute to the vitality of our community, and foster social inclusion and social equity.

### *Neighbourhood Associations*

Neighbourhood Associations contribute to the safety, resiliency, and vibrancy of a neighbourhood by creating positive relationships between residents. They can meet regularly to discuss neighbourhood issues, including safety challenges, and work to address them on a neighbourhood level. Neighbourhood associations also create a sense of belonging for many of its residents by providing programming, community projects, or special events. In 2022, the City adopted a Neighbourhood Association Supports Policy and committed to providing \$10,000 annually through a grant program to support recognized neighbourhood associations with operational and event costs.

### *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy – Building Safer Communities*

In March 2022, Public Safety Canada announced new federal funding to address community safety through the Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF). The objective of this fund is to help municipalities and Indigenous communities prevent gun and gang violence by addressing their root causes. The City has been allocated \$1.8 million from Public Safety Canada until March 2026 to develop and implement a strategic plan to address gun and gang violence. The proposed title of the strategic plan will be the 'Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy'.

The intent of the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy will be to provide a set of actions to be implemented in year 2, 3, and 4 of the funding for increasing youth resiliency and safety in the community. The strategy will focus on reducing risk, vulnerability, and harm for youth and children by incorporating upstream preventative programming to reduce the demand for incident responses related to gun and gang violence. The strategy will be consistent with the social determinants of health by addressing root causes known to negatively influence a young person's life. The strategy is being developed with community partners (including Nanaimo Ladysmith Public Schools, Snuneymuxw First Nation, RCMP and many others) in collaboration with the City's Parks, Recreation and Culture Division and the Community Development Department.

## **CONCLUSION**

The City is actively engaged in downstream, midstream, and upstream programs and initiatives that either directly address or influence community safety and security. The programs and initiatives listed are just some of the examples of different ways the City is working to address community safety and security. The five goals identified in City Plan and the actions taken to implement them will further contribute to the overall safety and security of Nanaimo.

## **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The City of Nanaimo provides safety and security through emergency response services such as fire, bylaw, and policing. In addition, the City has an important impact on some of the root causes of crime and social disorder through its influence on the design of the built environment, provision of community amenities (buildings, parks etc.), and programs/initiatives that support social development, recreation, culture and wellness.
- The implementation of City Plan, as identified through the Integrated Action Plan, outlines further programs and initiatives related to community safety and security.

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