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**SUBJECT DOWNTOWN NANAIMO COMMUNITY SAFETY ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report:**

To provide Council with an update on progress on the implementation of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

The increasing presence of visible homelessness; open drug use; incidents of crime; unsanitary conditions; and overall social disorder has given rise to the perception that Downtown Nanaimo has become unsafe. In 2021, Council commissioned the development of a Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan (Action Plan) to provide specific measures to address the most serious and visible issues in the City Centre, recognizing that local governments lack the mandate, resources and tools to tackle poverty, addiction, trauma, mental health and other causal factors.

The Action Plan was created by Neilson Strategies Inc. in collaboration with Bob Rich Consulting and adopted by Council in the spring of 2022, providing a coordinated strategy to improve public safety and supports for vulnerable citizens in Nanaimo's Downtown Core business and entertainment district. The Action Plan recommendations included the creation of a new Community Safety Officer Unit supported by; two full-time sanitation Clean Teams; seasonal (summer) Park Attendants; a Vandalism Relief Grant; improvements to cleaning and security in Parkade facilities; and ongoing assessment of public spaces to improve safety.

The projected cost to implement the plan is \$2.5 million annually, and does not include 2022 budget commitments for four additional RCMP officer positions which would be used initially to support the Downtown area. This report will provide Council with an update on current conditions and progress in implementation of the Action Plan.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan Overview**

A number of guiding points set the stage for development of the Action Plan. It is intended to be supportive of recommendations from the Health and Housing Systems Planning Organization (SPO) which coordinates homelessness prevention and response efforts, but is focused on measures to improve safety and security in Downtown Nanaimo. It is recognized that disorder is a symptom of complex social problems, and that the 'downstream' focus of the plan will not provide solutions without upstream investments in housing and health services.

The desired outcomes of the plan are to improve the situation downtown, and to provide supports for residents, businesses, service providers, and for homeless and vulnerable citizens. This is to be achieved by providing timely responses to incidents of public disorder, engaging directly with the street homeless population to provide points of entry for contact and engagement and to reduce the need for police interventions.

Enhanced municipal services will improve accessibility and cleanliness of public spaces and infrastructure, and improve perception that Downtown Nanaimo is an appealing and welcoming place to live, visit, and work. The Action Plan proposes development of future governance structures to identify changes and new initiatives, and to coordinate efforts of police, local government, service providers, business improvement and community associations.

### **Community Safety Officer Unit**

A key recommendation of the action plan was the creation of a Community Safety Officer (CSO) Team. CSOs are City employees who are similar to Bylaw Enforcement Officers in status and legal authority as outlined in the *Community Charter*, but are distinct in role, training, and work hours.

Specifics on the CSO service model include:

- **Work Hours**

The 12-person CSO unit consists of three teams of three officers and one team of two officers who work seven days a week between the hours of 6:00 a.m. – 1:30 a.m. (19.5 hours daily) in ten hour shifts. Two teams work Sunday to Wednesday, and the other teams work Wednesday to Saturday. Large work projects, training, and professional development is scheduled on Wednesdays when all of the CSOs are working. The senior CSO, the supervisor, works Monday to Friday. The extended CSO work hours are a significant enhancement in municipal and enforcement service to the Downtown Core as Bylaw Officers traditionally have not worked nighttime or early morning shifts in accordance with the terms of collective agreements.

- **Training**

Specialized training is an important feature of the CSO program. The Officers have varied and diverse experience in social services, clinical outreach, policing and bylaw enforcement. To be effective in engaging and assisting people in need, the CSOs have received training in:

- Developing relationships, de-escalation, and debriefing
- Indigenous cultural awareness and sensitivity
- First aid, CPR and administering Naloxone
- Trauma informed practices
- Mental Health first aid
- Recognizing emotionally disturbed persons
- Homelessness awareness
- Drug identification
- Law and policy

- **Proactive Patrols**

CSOs interact with downtown businesses to build relationships respond to incidents of social disorder and provide advice on crime prevention, with a target to provide

responses within 30 minutes of receiving a call. Officers patrol on foot and on bicycles and proactively engage with unsheltered and vulnerable citizens providing points of entry for contact and engagement with health, outreach, and government services. They continuously explore the provision of different types of supports including distributing clothing and blankets in winter months, staffing emergency warming centers and directing people to community shelters, shower programs, overdose prevention, warming and sobering centres. Whenever possible, CSOs provide engagement and de-escalation services to reduce the need for police interventions. CSOs provide the only continuous, proactive beat patrols in city parks and Downtown streets and have provided life-saving medical assistance to overdose victims on many occasions.

- **Supporting Health and Social Services**

The CSO unit has established relationships with service providers in Downtown Nanaimo and regularly meet with outreach teams from Island Health, the non-profit sector, and local Indigenous communities. They also sit on Nanaimo’s Situation Table which identifies vulnerable people and collaboratively and rapidly connect them to services to prevent negative or traumatic events.

<b>COMMUNITY SAFETY OFFICER UNIT CALLS FOR SERVICE SUMMARY 2022/2023</b>						
	October	November	December	January	February	Total
Total Calls	685	790	534	880	576	<b>3,465</b>
Assist Outreach	3		3	3	11	<b>20</b>
Check welfare	186	195	188	336	267	<b>1,172</b>
Mental health	13	45	10	9	25	<b>102</b>
Security	88	95	72	132	110	<b>497</b>
Drug-related	29		16		19	<b>64</b>
Encampments	126	108	34	63	26	<b>357</b>
Parkades	89	209	143	124	80	<b>645</b>
Assist clean team		75	25	68	32	<b>200</b>
Assist fire		14		13	4	<b>31</b>
Assist RCMP		7	3	11	7	<b>25</b>
Assist EHS			10		8	<b>18</b>

### Public Spaces and Assets

The Action Plan includes new programs to keep public spaces and infrastructure clean, safe and accessible to the community.

### Community Clean Teams

In 2019, the sanitation department created a ‘Clean Team’ unit pilot project consisting of two sanitation workers and a truck that substantially focused on cleanliness in public spaces in the Downtown Core in support of the Bylaw Enforcement Department in managing accumulations of garbage and filth associated with homeless encampments. The Clean Team was temporary and intermittently funded until implementation of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan provides for two full-time 2-person clean teams which substantially focus on Downtown Nanaimo and work directly in support of the Community Safety Officer unit. The second team started in January 2023. They now provide seven-day-a-week coverage, with team

one working Monday to Friday 7:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., and team two Wednesday to Sunday (10:00 a.m. – 6:30 p.m. Wednesday - Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday). The Clean Teams typically work with the CSOs for up to six hours a shift, and spend the remainder performing other clean-up duties.

Two large custom-designed trucks equipped with on-board pressure washer and generator equipment have been ordered, but may take up to a year to arrive. Two Glutton industrial waste vacuum cleaners, which are eco-friendly and capable of collecting all waste material from garbage to cigarette ends to waste materials from sidewalks and surfaces, have also been ordered.

The sanitation department has strategically placed a large roll-off disposal bin at the 1 Port Drive property and will be ordering and placing three more bins around the community to provide quick, strategic drop-off points to optimize staff time and efficiency. Plans for additional publicly accessible garbage receptacles are under development.

### **Vandalism Relief Grant**

Incidents of public disorder have resulted in an increase in vandalism not only to public assets, but also to privately-owned properties and buildings. Graffiti is a pervasive problem that contributes to blight and perception of urban decay and can impose significant and recurring costs to property owners. The Action Plan provides for funding for a Vandalism Relief Grant to assist property owners in Downtown Nanaimo with the cost of work required to repair damage caused by vandalism or break-in and to remove graffiti from their premises.

The grant program commenced in October 2022 and is administered by the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the City of Nanaimo through a service agreement which will continue over the next five years. A total of \$8,805.88 was dispersed in 2022 for twelve incidents which included broken windows, pried doors and break-ins.

### **Parkade Security Improvements**

The City manages three major Parkade facilities located in the Downtown area with 901 parking stalls available for public use. The Parkades support Downtown businesses, residents, Protection Island residents, and accommodate the parking needs of major downtown amenities including the Vancouver Island Conference Centre, The Port Theatre, the Vancouver Island Regional Library, hotels, and the Casino. Parking facilities are comprised of large volumes of permeable space, are filled with high-asset property and have relatively low levels of activity making them susceptible to crime.

With a large unsheltered population in the Downtown area, Parkade facilities are continuously occupied by homeless individuals who take refuge in parking areas and adjoining stairwells, corridors, elevators, and vestibules. Incidents of conflict between parking patrons and unauthorized persons, damage to infrastructure, fires, thefts and damage to vehicles in Parkades are frequent. These spaces are continuously fouled with graffiti, garbage, and human waste. Pacrim Risk and Security Consulting was engaged to conduct security assessments for the three City-operated parking facilities in the fall of 2022. The consultants have provided recommendations to reduce vulnerabilities but have determined that it would be difficult and cost prohibitive to attempt to secure the facilities sufficiently to eliminate unauthorized pedestrian ingress.

The major recommendations are to invest in improvements to visual surveillance, intrusion detection, and an unrelenting maintenance painting and cleaning program. It is important to note that while the challenges in Nanaimo's parking facilities are shared to a greater or lesser degree by virtually every public parking space in the country, the consultants concluded that these facilities are on the 'greater' end of the spectrum in their experience.

The CCTV system in the Port of Nanaimo Centre parkade which is no longer functional will be updated and replaced in the summer of 2023 at a cost of \$145,000. A camera system valued at \$110,000 will also be installed in Harbour Front Parkade. Opportunities to develop an operational centre to provide real-time camera monitoring and event-based responses in cases of intrusions and other threats.

Additional investments in fencing compounds around mechanical HVAC equipment and upgrades to elevators are needed due to continuous incidents of vandalism. Despite nightly pressure washing and cleaning, the facility stairwells have been continuously fouled by urine and human waste and can no longer be cleaned sufficiently to remove stain and odour and need to be repainted with liquid repellent products.

These security and maintenance improvements are imperative to change the perception and appeal of parkades and to restore the facilities to their original purpose of providing safe, clean parking amenities for people who visit, work, and live downtown.

### **Public Space and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) Improvements**

The Community Safety Policing Program at the Nanaimo RCMP Detachment collaborated with Vancouver Island University and downtown neighborhood associations in 2021 to conduct three safety audits downtown. Results from these surveys were instrumental in understanding present safety challenges, the need for physical improvements and assisted in the development of the Action Plan. Council is considering proposals to revitalize the Downtown Core, with improvements to make Diana Krall Plaza more of an event area, to redesign Commercial Street, and to make intersections more pedestrian friendly. Planning is currently underway to train CSO officers in CPTED theory and practices to develop in-house expertise to recommend and implement CPTED improvements based on information from safety audits and input from downtown residents and businesses.

### **Park Attendants**

In 2020, at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the City developed a temporary Park Ambassador program to patrol parklands to encourage physical distancing, monitor park assets, and assist with minor cleaning and litter pickup. The Action Plan proposed the re-implementation of Park Ambassadors who provide an additional staff presence in parks and plazas who can observe and report incidents of social disorder and provide information and assistance to visitors and park users through the summer of 2022.

Four seasonal park attendants provided additional supports and patrols in downtown parks from the months of June to the end of September in 2022 and was well-received by the community. The Park Attendant program is currently under review and is anticipated to resume in the summer of 2024.

## **Downtown Ambassadors**

The City operated an Ambassador program in Downtown Nanaimo through the Community Policing Office between 2007 and 2012, which concluded when funding from Service Canada ended.

The Action Plan proposes the creation of a new community-based Ambassador Program consisting of community members who provide a visible presence Downtown wearing distinctive uniforms and engage with, and provide assistance to businesses, residents, visitors, and people in need. The role of ambassadors is to provide extra eyes on the street, to engage with people they encounter and to report incidents which require attention.

Downtown ambassador programs exist in a number of other British Columbia communities and are typically functions of business improvement associations (BIA). It is recognized that the BIAs which operate in the city centre do not presently have the capacity to develop, manage, and deliver an ambassador program at the present time, and no City funding has been committed. The City will continue to explore opportunities to support an ambassador program if interested organizations are identified. |

## **CONCLUSION**

The Action Plan will need to evolve as conditions in Downtown Nanaimo change in the future and will involve coordination with other key stakeholder groups, including the Systems Planning Organization (SPO) which will commence operations on 2023-APR-01 providing a coordinated approach to homelessness in the community. Further work is required to develop an Action Plan governance strategy which identifies progress, measures to evaluate the efficacy of individual actions and the overall plan, to develop necessary changes to existing actions in collaboration with community stakeholders and to report progress to Senior Administration and Council. |

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- Council approved the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan in April 2022 outlining a new coordinated and proactive approach to public safety.
- The report provides Council with an update on progress in implementation of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan.

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