

DATE OF MEETING JULY 10, 2023

AUTHORED BY DAVID LABERGE, DIRECTOR, BYLAW SERVICES

SUBJECT PROVINCIAL COMMUNITY SAFETY AND WELLBEING GRANT FUNDS

OVERVIEW

Purpose of Report

To inform and receive Council's approval for a proposal to utilize \$75,000 of Provincial Funding to evaluate the impact and progress of the Downtown Community Safety Action Plan, and the feasibility of enhancing and expanding the plan to be a community-wide initiative. |

Recommendation

That Council direct staff to proceed with utilizing the Provincial Community Safety and Wellbeing grant funds to conduct an evaluation of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, and the feasibility of enhancing and expanding the plan to be a City-wide initiative.

BACKGROUND

The Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Honourable Mike Farnworth, announced \$75,000 in funding to develop a Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan (CSWB) for Nanaimo during a recent visit to the City with the Premier and the Attorney General. A CSWB plan consults with community to identify risks and proactively works to develop evidence based strategies and programs to address local priorities related to crime and complex social issues. |

DISCUSSION

Discussions with the Province highlighted the extensive consultation already undertaken in the community over the past two years to develop strategies, actions, programs, and initiatives to improve CSWB, including;

- Completion of the *Health and Housing Action Plan (HHAP)*, which outlines actions to address complex social issues related to health and housing. The consultation conducted in the development of the HHAP was extensive and included design labs and community conversations related to health, housing, social disorder, and homelessness related issues. Over 200 participants shared their input into the action plan and it included topics on business sector solutions, public awareness and education, media, neighbourhood-based solutions, legal and justice, crime and safety, recovery, social inclusion and wellbeing, employment, education and poverty reduction. All aspects normally collected in a CSWB plan.
- Adoption of *City Plan*, which provides strategic direction for the next 25 years on land use; Truth and Reconciliation; climate adaptation; health and wellness; safety and security;

diversity; accessibility and inclusion; economic prosperity; and, sustainable living. Over 13,700 Nanaimo community members participated in the development of City Plan through written submissions, community information sessions, focus groups, surveys, social media and website participation. CSWB was identified as one of the top topics through this engagement. Many of the policies and actions outlined in City Plan provide upstream, midstream, and downstream approaches to addressing CSWB.

- Creation of the *Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan*, which included further community consultation and focuses on addressing the highest risk, most serious and most visible issues in the City Centre. The Downtown Safety Action Plan provides a coordinated approach to community safety and provides additional supports to the ongoing challenges with social disorder downtown.
- Completion of the *Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy*, which provides strategic direction to prevent youth from engaging in gun and gang violence by addressing root causes of crime and gang involvement by working upstream to address local risk factors and enhancing protective factors. Development of the strategy included the engagement of 229 individuals and included non-profit service agencies, Snuneymuxw First Nation, youth, parents, businesses and individuals with lived experience.

With the extensive consultation done over the last two years with diverse community members on CSWB, and the current strategies, actions, programs, and initiatives being implemented, Staff are proposing to utilize the CSWB grant funds towards evaluating the Downtown Safety Action Plan and conducting a feasibility study on expanding or enhancing the plan to be a City-wide initiative. The evaluation and feasibility study would include ensuring that the Downtown Safety Action Plan is aligned with the HHAP, the Youth Resilience Strategy, City Plan, Nanaimo's newly formed Situation Table, and Nanaimo RCMP Strategic priorities. Staff have received support from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to proceed in this direction should Council wish to endorse this approach.

Downtown Safety Action Plan

The Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan was developed by Neilson Strategies Inc. to address rising levels of social disorder, drug use, homelessness, and crime in the downtown core, recognizing that specific measures were needed to address the highest-risk, most visible and serious issues. The plan outlines strategies for tiered responses by public safety personnel; to behavioural and disorder issues; programs to keep public spaces and infrastructure clean, safe and accessible; and, recommendations for a governance plan to align these efforts with measures taken by other agencies.

A key feature of the plan was the creation of a Community Safety Officer unit (CSO) within the Bylaw Services Department that would provide proactive patrols in the downtown area engaging with unsheltered citizens, de-escalating difficult situations, and providing assistance where possible. Two full-time enhanced Clean Teams would support and assist the CSOs in keeping public spaces and infrastructure clean and accessible. Additional investments in parkade access control and security and public space CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) improvements were also recommended.

The review of the Downtown Safety Action Plan will assist in determining if the measures that have been undertaken have impacted the problems they were designed to address, and if strategies and initiatives in the plan can deliver more benefits in addressing CSWB for Nanaimo.

OPTIONS

1. That Council direct staff to proceed with utilizing the Provincial Community Safety and Wellbeing grant funds to conduct an evaluation of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, and the feasibility of enhancing and expanding the plan to be a City-wide initiative.

The advantages of this option:

- To support and enhance existing initiatives that address community safety and wellbeing.
- Staff have received support from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to use the CSWB grant funds to conduct an evaluation and feasibility study of the Downtown Safety Action Plan. The evaluation will consider opportunities to ensure alignment and support with other strategies and initiatives.
- A review of the Downtown Safety Action Plan will determine if the strategies and initiatives that have been undertaken are effective and can be expanded.

The disadvantages of this option:

- Staff time is required to manage the CSWB grant funds.

Financial Implications

- The proposed evaluation and feasibility study of the Downtown Safety Action Plan is 100% funded by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. The 2023-2027 Financial Plan will be amended to include this initiative.

2. That Council provide alternative direction.

SUMMARY POINTS

- The Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General has provided \$75,000 in funding to support the creation of a Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan for Nanaimo.
- Extensive consultation has been done over the last two years with diverse community members on community safety and wellbeing, and strategies, actions, programs and initiatives are being implemented through the Health and Housing Action Plan, City Plan, the Downtown Safety Action Plan and the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy.
- Staff have received support from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to use the Community Safety and Wellbeing grant funds to evaluate the measures implemented through the Downtown Community Safety Action Plan and explore the feasibility of expanding the plan to be a City-wide initiative.
- The evaluation and feasibility study will ensure that the Downtown Safety Action Plan is aligned with the Health and Housing Action Plan, the Nanaimo Youth Resilience Strategy, City Plan, Nanaimo's newly formed Situation Table, and Nanaimo RCMP Strategic priorities.

ATTACHMENTS:

ATTACHMENT A: Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan |

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