

DATE OF MEETING    DECEMBER 18, 2023  
AUTHORED BY        DAVID LABERGE, DIRECTOR, BYLAW SERVICES  
**SUBJECT                VANDALISM RELIEF GRANT PROGRAM**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To inform and update Council on the implementation of the Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant Program, and to provide options to expand grant eligibility.

### **Recommendation**

That Council direct Staff to amend the service agreement for the Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant Program with the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce to allow businesses to apply for funding more than twice, and to receive up to \$2,500 per incident up to a maximum of \$5,000 in a calendar year.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the regular meeting held 2023-MAY-15, Council passed the following motion:

*“Staff prepare a report back to Council with options to expand funding to the Vandalism Relief Grant fund, and that the grant program be amended to allow properties/businesses to apply more than twice per year, and to receive up to \$2,500 per incident, up to a maximum of \$5,000 per year.”*

## **DISCUSSION**

Nanaimo’s Vandalism Relief program (VRGP) was established in 2022 as one of the recommendations of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan. The grants are intended to provide quick economic assistance to businesses and property owners who experience incidents of vandalism and crime. Grant funding of \$50,000 was provided in 2022, and \$30,000 in successive years to the end of 2026.

The terms of a service agreement with the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) were approved by Council on 2022-OCT-24 to have them administer the VRGP on behalf of the City. Terms of the agreement include that;

- Applicants must be storefront businesses or commercial property owners located in the downtown area with a current business licence or otherwise in good standing with the City.
- Funds to be provided to assist with repairs to damage caused by incidents of crime and vandalism.

- A maximum of two claims to be accepted from an applicant within a calendar year to a maximum of \$1,000 per claim.
- Grants do not cover expenses covered by insurance
- The Chamber to receive a 15% administration fee
- Unused grant amounts outstanding at the end of the year will be returned to the City.
- Chamber to provide the City with annual reporting

This approach was undertaken after a comparison of vandalism relief programs in other communities. For example, the City of Victoria offers one-time grants to a maximum of \$1,000, and the City of Kamloops provides up to two grants of \$500. The grants are intended to provide quick assistance to businesses after incidents of crime, but not to substitute or replace the need for regular insurance.

The program commenced in December of 2022, and grant applications were accepted for incidents dating back as early as September with \$10,125 in funding disbursed (including administrative fees) for the year.

Twenty five applications have been approved in 2023 to the end of September and \$24,552.42 of funding has been disbursed.

The Chamber has reported that approximately one half of applications for grant assistance request the full \$1,000 amount, and it is their opinion that this has been sufficient for the requirements of the applicants.

Several downtown businesses experienced vandalism on more than two occasions in the spring of 2023, and the Chamber was authorized to accept one additional (a third) grant application in circumstances where businesses were experiencing hardship. In such cases the City was to be notified so the Community Safety Unit could evaluate the situation, increase area patrols and provide CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) recommendations.

The Chamber has also been authorized to retain the services of a contractor to remove graffiti from private buildings on a proactive basis provided that work be completed at ground level and not require repainting or alteration of a damaged surface to a maximum of \$3,000 annually.

### **Increasing Number of Eligible Grant Applications and Amounts**

Council has directed staff to provide options to increase the number of eligible grants in a calendar year from two to three, and to increase the maximum grant amount from \$1,000 to \$2,500 per incident to a maximum of \$5,000 in a calendar year.

Council will note that the Chamber has already been authorized to accept up to three grant applications in a calendar year. It should be noted that grants are approved on a first-come, first-served basis until funds are exhausted. The terms of the service agreement were developed to ensure that funds would be available to as many affected businesses as possible throughout the calendar year.

### **Expanding the Vandalism Relief Grant Program City Wide**

In previous discussions, Council has expressed interest in options to provide opportunities for businesses city-wide to be eligible for vandalism relief funding. While this possibility was not part

of the Council motion, staff obtained statistical information from the RCMP showing the distribution of break-ins and property damage incidents to businesses in Nanaimo for the period 2022-JAN-01 to 2023-MAR-31 delineating these incidents from the downtown core for the purpose of evaluating the VRGP.

Key findings of the downtown and non-downtown comparison include;

- Of 395 reported incidents, 131 occurred downtown (as defined by the catchment area of the VRGP). 264 occurred outside of the downtown area, of which 25 were within 1 km of downtown.
- 34% of all business break-ins occurred downtown.
- A majority of graffiti occurred outside the downtown core. (which may be accounted for by the fact that 41% of reported graffiti occurred at schools)
- 33% of (combined) break-ins and vandalism incidents to businesses occur downtown.

The Chamber has indicated that expansion of the VRGP city-wide would be well received, but would recommend that funding for graffiti removal not be included. It is the Chamber's experience that downtown businesses are potentially more susceptible to vandalism than in other areas of the city due to factors including the concentration of nightclubs and unsheltered citizens who take overnight refuge in doorways of buildings.

The Chamber has proposed that Council may wish to consider allowing businesses to access grant funding to install preventative security measures including CCTV, security gating, private security patrols and CPTED/security audits. The City of Victoria's vandalism grant program takes this approach by providing up to 50% of the cost of security upgrades for businesses to a maximum of \$1,000.

### **Provincial Vandalism Relief Program**

The provincial government has announced a new \$10.5 million Security Small Business Rebate Program starting in the fall of 2023, which will provide up to \$2,000 per business for the cost of repairs due to vandalism, and up to \$1,000 for vandalism prevention. Prevention measures eligible for funding could include security cameras or gates, graffiti cleaning or repairs to broken doors or windows, and will be available retroactively to 2023-JAN-01. This funding is now available to small businesses city-wide.

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

Council will recall that the City recently received \$75,000 funding from the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General to develop a Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan. Given that extensive work and consultation had been completed over the past two years in the development of the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan, it was proposed that the funds be utilized to evaluate the implementation of the plan, whether measures have impacted the problems they were designed to address, and to determine if it is feasible to expand them city-wide.

The proposal was accepted by the province and approved by Council at the 2023-JUL-10 meeting. An RFP has been issued and this work will commence later in the year after a contractor is selected. The scope of work will likely include a review of the VRGP and recommendations for revisions or enhancement if needed with the availability of new provincial funding. |

## OPTIONS

1. That Council direct Staff to amend the service agreement for the Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant Program with the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce to allow businesses to apply for funding more than twice, and to receive up to \$2,500 per incident up to a maximum of \$5,000 in a calendar year.

The advantages of this option:

- This option aligns with the 2023-MAY-15 Council motion.
- Additional assistance will be provided to businesses & property owners who are affected by crime

The disadvantages of this option:

- As grants are allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, there is potential that funding will not be distributed equitably among all businesses impacted by crime.

Financial Implications: None.

2. That Council direct Staff to amend the service agreement for the Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant Program with the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce fund to allow properties or businesses to apply for funding more than twice, and to receive up to \$2,500 per incident up to a maximum of \$5,000 per year which may include up to 50% of the cost of installation of security and preventative measures to a maximum of \$1,000.

The advantages of this option:

- This option aligns with the 2023-MAY-15 Council motion.
- Businesses that are repeatedly victimized by crime are eligible to receive more financial support.
- Funding can be utilized to invest in measures that will deter or prevent crime.

The disadvantages of this option:

- As grant are allocated on a first come, first-served basis, there is a potential that funding will not be distributed equitably among businesses impacted by incidents of crime.

Financial Implications: None.

3. That Council continue with existing terms of eligibility for Vandalism Relief Grants.

The advantages of this option:

- The vandalism relief grant program is adequately funded and effective in providing timely supports to downtown businesses after incidents of crime.
- The Chamber of Commerce has been given discretion to approve up to three grant applications in a calendar year for businesses who are victimized by crime repeatedly.
- Grant amounts are comparable to programs in other communities and can be equitably distributed to businesses impacted by crime.
- New provincial funding is available which provides additional financial supports to businesses impacted by crime.

The disadvantages of this option:

- This option does not align with the 2023-MAY-15 Council motion.

Financial Implications: None. |

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant was developed in 2022.
- Downtown businesses are currently eligible for two grants in a calendar year to a maximum of \$1,000 each, with discretion for a third grant at the discretion of the Chamber.
- Council has directed a review of the Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant program to allow businesses to apply for funding more than twice and to receive up to \$2,500 per incident to a maximum of \$5,000 in a calendar year.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT A: Service Agreement and Eligibility Criteria for Vandalism Relief Grant Program |

**Submitted by:**

David LaBerge  
Director, Bylaw Services |

**Concurrence by:**

Dale Lindsay  
CAO |