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## NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SAFER DOWNTOWN WORKING GROUP

### City initiates downtown security patrol program

The City of Nanaimo is launching a two-member downtown security patrol as part of a comprehensive downtown security initiative through the newly-formed Safer Downtown Working Group.

City Council on Monday approved spending \$35,000 on the patrol project which will begin work in July, continuing until the end of September when its success will be evaluated. It will operate out of the Community Service Office between the hours of 10 a.m. and 10 p.m. daily.

The Downtown Nanaimo Partnership is contributing to the total cost.

The Working Group is co-chaired by Councillors Merv Unger and Diane Brennan. Other members are Randy Churchill, Manager of Bylaw Services, City Social Planner John Horn, Tim DAVIDSON of City Bylaw Services, Executive Director of the Downtown Nanaimo Partnership George Hansen, Cpl. Dave Laberge of the RCMP Bicycle Unit, Cst. Wally Taylor of the RCMP Community Policing and Marg Fraser of the Vancouver Island Health Authority. They are backed up by eight staff advisors.

“The operative phrase is “working group”, said Unger. “The recent focus on privately-funded patrols highlighted the need for immediate action, and that’s what we’re doing. Staff and the DNP believe a security patrol is necessary to meet the increased current pressures of a more visible street population in areas of our downtown,” he added.

The patrol will be contracted by the city, and operated under the direction of the Community Services Office which is staffed by Cst. Wally Taylor of the RCMP and Bylaw Officer Tim Davidson.

“The patrols are expected to be an effective tool in reducing public disorder downtown,” said Unger. “They will verbally engage those involved in non-criminal public disorder and attempt to negotiate compliance. If that doesn’t work, they will engage police or bylaws officers. It is believed that the first level of intervention will achieve positive results without over taxing police and Bylaw Services resources,” he said.

Brennan cautioned that security efforts alone will not eliminate crime and disorder downtown. “The patrols will alleviate some of the pressures in areas of downtown,” said Brennan. “They will deal with matters of non-criminal public disorder and will liaise with social and mental health agencies, downtown business owners, Bylaw Services and the RCMP Bike Patrol,” she added.

“Harm Reduction and Hard-to-House initiatives through the Nanaimo Working Group on Homelessness and the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) play a critical role in the overall health of downtown,” she said. “Without a balanced approach to the health of the downtown, security efforts will only be effective in moving the disorderly behaviour geographically around the downtown, including surrounding residential neighbourhoods.”

The Safer Downtown Working Group’s meetings are open to the public and open to public input. The next meeting will be held at 2 p.m. July 12 at the City Hall board room.

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