



CITY OF NANAIMO

BAR WATCH

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That Council authorize the City and the RCMP to endorse and actively support the efforts of Nanaimo's nightclubs to develop and operate a Downtown Nanaimo Bar Watch Society and Program; and,
2. that such support include the expectation, expressed through the *Good Neighbour Agreement*, that all existing and future nightclubs in Downtown Nanaimo/town centre locations participate in Nanaimo's Bar Watch Program.

BACKGROUND:

The *City of Nanaimo Liquor Control Strategy*, adopted by Council in early 2003, contained the following recommendation:

- *THAT Council work with Staff, the RCMP and the nightclub businesses to establish a Bar Watch Program designed to penalize, through warnings and denied entry to nightclubs, persons who are acting uncivilly.*

The text of the *Strategy* (Chapter 5) refers to the Bar Watch Program that operates in the community of Barrow-in-Furness in the UK. The Barrow program is very similar in nature to the Bar Watch Program that is operated by nightclub establishments in Downtown Vancouver. The Barrow program also bears similarity to the program that existed in the late 1990s in Downtown Victoria.

This report provides an overview of Bar Watch for Council's consideration. The overview relies heavily on the Vancouver experience which, it is believed, could be replicated in Downtown Nanaimo.

OVERVIEW:

The points below describe Bar Watch:

- *Purpose?* The purpose of Bar Watch is to promote the safety and security of patrons in downtown licensed establishments. More specifically, Bar Watch exists to discourage and, ultimately, prevent patrons from engaging in unlawful and uncivil behaviour that endangers other patrons, staff and police within member establishments, and that impugns the establishments' good reputations in the community.

- *Impetus ?* The impetus for establishing Bar Watch appears to differ by community. In Barrow, Bar Watch was established in response to the unlawful drug-related activities that were occurring within the city's bars. In Vancouver, the Program was put into place initially to combat the gang presence that was escalating in downtown nightclubs. In Victoria, rowdiness and related types of uncivil behaviour associated with nightclub patrons created the need for Bar Watch.

It is worth noting that the specific problems which gave rise to the various Bar Watch initiatives have not, in every case, remained the key focus as programs have evolved over time. In Vancouver, for instance, the need to deal with rowdiness and similar types of uncivil behaviour has eclipsed, to some extent, Bar Watch's original emphasis on gangs.

- *Participants ?* There are several parties involved in a successful Bar Watch Program, including:
 - the nightclub establishments that operate and own the program
 - the local police who sponsor and actively support the program
 - other municipal departments that support the program
 - provincial liquor license inspectors who support the program and work with its members

In Vancouver's Bar Watch, the membership consists almost entirely of downtown nightclubs. All types of licensed establishments within and outside of the downtown core, however, are eligible to apply for membership.

- *How it Works ?* In the Vancouver program, each participating establishment is required to install a video camera (CCTV) at its entrance, alongside of posted Bar Watch signs. Patrons entering the club are informed by the signs that they are entering an establishment that participates in the Bar Watch Program, and that Bar Watch is sponsored by the Vancouver Police Department. Patrons are advised that they are being taped and that such tapes will be turned over to the Vancouver Police Department in response to a subpoena. Patrons are also informed that a strict dress code is in effect, which includes a no-gang-colour policy. The clear message given to patrons entering a Bar Watch establishment is that unlawful and uncivil behaviour will not be tolerated.

In addition to the CCTV and signs located at the entrance to the participating premises, Bar Watch members alert each other and the police of potential problems. For example, a nightclub that ejects or refuses entry to an individual who has been acting abusively will inform other clubs and the police of the action taken. A description of the person will be provided so that all parties can be "on the lookout". This communication among members and the police has led several observers to draw parallels between Bar Watch and the more familiar Neighbourhood Watch.

- *Governance and Organization ?* Vancouver's Bar Watch is governed by a non-profit Bar Watch Society, established under BC's *Societies Act*. In keeping with the requirements of the legislation, the Society has a Board of Directors and key officers (e.g., President, Treasurer, Secretary). The Society has a set of bylaws (drawn from the template provided in the legislation) which sets out voting procedures, meeting arrangements and other basic governance and organizational details (copy attached). The Society has one part-time paid staff member (Secretary), who receives an honorarium of \$150 per month.

- *Meetings ?* Vancouver's Bar Watch Society meets once per month at a participating member's establishment. Representatives of the Vancouver Police Department attend every meeting to discuss topics of mutual interest, provide information and answer questions. Education has become an important part of the Police Department's involvement in Bar Watch. In past meetings, police officers have delivered educational seminars on topics such as the appropriate use of force in dealing with unruly patrons.

Provincial liquor license inspectors frequently attend Bar Watch meetings, as do representatives of the City's Fire Department and other divisions. License inspectors may discuss with the group the requirements of license holders under the province's new liquor laws. Fire fighters may outline to the group the types of safety concerns that the Fire Department investigates during its regular inspections.

- *Commitment ?* Each participating establishment in Vancouver's Bar Watch pays annual dues of \$1,000 to cover legal fees, sponsorship commitments and administration fees. Each establishment is also, as suggested earlier, required to purchase, operate and maintain a CCTV at its entrance. In addition to these items, participating establishments are required to sign a Bar Watch agreement (copy attached), which is similar in nature to a Good Neighbour Agreement (which the establishments must also sign).

The police and other city departments are not members of Bar Watch, but are active supporters of the Program. The Vancouver Police Department actually serves as a sponsor of Bar Watch ? this sponsorship lends added credibility and clout to the program. The ongoing and active support of all relevant departments, especially the police, is critical to Bar Watch's success.

It is worth noting that, to date, participation in Vancouver's Bar Watch Program has been voluntary for licensed establishments. Twenty-five establishments, almost all of which are downtown nightclubs, are presently involved. The Bar Watch Secretary reports that the City of Vancouver is considering a business license bylaw amendment that would make involvement in Bar Watch mandatory for all new nightclubs in the downtown core.

LESSONS LEARNED:

Interviews conducted with individuals who are familiar with the existing Vancouver program and the defunct Victoria program point to a key finding: Bar Watch works best when the participating establishments take ownership of the program. The support of the local police and other city departments is critical, to be sure. The police and/or City Hall, however, are not the best bodies to run the program. Like Neighbourhood Watch, Bar Watch needs to be a participant-driven effort ? facilitated and supported by the police, but operated and owned by the stakeholders that the program exists to serve.

The importance of member ownership can be illustrated by comparing the Bar Watch experience in Vancouver to that in Victoria. In Vancouver, the program is owned and operated by the establishments that the program is intended to serve. The Vancouver Police Department and the City of Vancouver actively support Bar Watch, but do not belong to the society which governs the program. In Victoria, a Bar Watch program was initiated in 1998 by the Victoria Police Department. Police ownership over the program meant that no Bar Watch Society was established, and no champions for the initiative stepped forward from the various nightclubs. Victoria's program effectively died in 2001 when the Police Department decided to reassign the officers who had been instrumental in promoting the initiative.

CONCLUSION:

The Vancouver experience demonstrates that Bar Watch can be an effective program for nightclub establishments. Through Bar Watch, establishments are better able to protect the safety and well-being of their patrons, to eliminate or reduce occurrences of unlawful and uncivil behaviour, and to promote the industry's image in the community. The Vancouver experience – and that of Victoria – also demonstrates that a successful Bar Watch effort requires ownership by the establishments themselves. Police and city support is important, but ownership must rest with the nightclubs.

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