

NEWS RELEASE

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Nanaimo responds to social issues in the downtown

Council allocates \$350k in funding to aid with health, social and safety issues

At their regular meeting on Monday, March 19, Council approved recommendations from the Finance and Audit Committee to allocate \$350,465 in funding as a response to health, social and safety issues in the downtown area.

These measures are intended to create a more vibrant and healthy downtown while also addressing issues of social equity and social exclusion. The items approved by Council carry a total cost of \$350,465.00. These include daytime security services, three portable toilets located in the city centre, additional safe syringe disposal boxes, a continuation of the shower program operated by the Unitarian Fellowship at Caledonia park, funding for the Extreme Weather shelter for the 2018/2019 winter season, and the placement of additional garbage cans in the city centre.

The funding will also contribute to John Howard Society programs, including a rent-supplement program and a contracted clean-up service. The clean-up service provides clients of the John Howard Society with an opportunity to contribute to the community by picking up litter downtown.

The funding also includes an annual \$100,000 towards the creation and operation of a health and wellness resource centre. The centre would provide services, supports and a place for homeless individuals to go during the day. The City of Nanaimo will seek partnerships with Provincial and Federal government agencies to make this happen.

City of Nanaimo Social Planner John Horn stated that "the increased incidence of homelessness in our community requires a vigorous response that addresses all aspects of this issue. We believe that the recommendations approved by Nanaimo City Council will go a long way to enhance the attractiveness of our downtown and at the same time meet the needs of those without permanent housing."

The City currently provides safe needle disposal boxes in 11 of its public facilities and at 9 outdoor locations. Public washrooms are provided in many of the parks in Nanaimo and a public toilet was installed in Diana Krall Plaza 5 years ago. Locations for the additional safe syringe disposal boxes and toilets will be determined with input from various user groups including the business and residential communities downtown as well as City Bylaw and Sanitation departments.

The Chair of Nanaimo's Public Safety Committee Councillor Sheryl Armstrong agrees; "It is important to address public safety issues and, at the same time, work to address the issues facing our homeless."

"The issue of discarded syringes and lack of public washrooms are key issues identified by downtown stakeholders, and we are pleased to invest in public infrastructure and services that will respond effectively to these concerns," said Mayor Bill McKay, adding that "a daytime space for homeless people will provide a sanctioned, safe and well-managed option that helps everybody."

Continued... Nanaimo responds to social issues in the downtown

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