VANDALISM RELIEF GRANT PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

The Vandalism Relief Grant Program was established in 2022 as one of the recommendations arising from the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan.

The Action Plan was developed in response to increasing social disorder and public safety concerns within Nanaimo's downtown core and sought to implement pragmatic, tangible measures focused on addressing the most serious, highest-risk, and most visible community safety issues. Desired outcomes of the Action Plan included improving perceptions of the downtown area, reducing social disorder, supporting businesses and neighbourhoods, strengthening connections to services, promoting a compassionate approach, and ensuring expectations and responsibilities were understood.

The Vandalism Relief Grant Program was intended to provide timely financial assistance to downtown businesses and commercial property owners experiencing financial losses associated with vandalism, break-ins, graffiti, and related property damage. The program was designed as a short-term relief measure to assist affected property owners while broader community safety initiatives contained within the Action Plan were implemented.

Council approved funding of $50,000 for the initial year of the program in 2022, followed by annual funding of $30,000 from 2023 through 2026. Administration of the program was delegated to the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce through a service agreement approved by Council on October 24, 2022.

Originally, applicants were eligible to receive up to $1,000 per incident to a maximum of two claims annually. Following a review of the program in 2023, Council amended the program to allow applicants to receive up to $2,500 per incident to a maximum of $5,000 per calendar year.

At the September 23, 2026 Finance and Audit Committee meeting, Council received the Chamber's annual report respecting administration of the 2025 funding year. During discussion, Council directed staff to prepare a report outlining options regarding the future of the program beyond 2026, including options to continue the grant in the downtown area and options to expand eligibility city-wide.

PROGRAM PERFORMANCE

Since its inception, the Vandalism Relief Grant Program has been fully subscribed each year. While originally conceived as a short-term relief initiative, demand for assistance has remained consistent. This suggests that businesses and property owners continue to incur costs associated with vandalism, break-ins, and related property crime and continue to view the program as a valuable support mechanism.

ORIGINAL EXPECTIONS VS REALITY

When the Vandalism Relief Grant Program was established, it was anticipated that demand would decline over time as additional community safety initiatives were implemented through the Downtown Nanaimo Community Safety Action Plan. While a number of those initiatives have since been

implemented, annual demand for vandalism relief funding has remained strong and available funding has continued to be fully allocated.

DOWNTOWN FOCUS VS CITY-WIDE NEED

Previous analysis conducted using RCMP statistics demonstrated that while downtown businesses experience a disproportionate concentration of vandalism and break-ins relative to the size of the area, many reported incidents affecting businesses occur outside the current program boundary. As a result, Council may wish to consider whether the program should continue as a targeted downtown economic recovery and community safety initiative or evolve into a broader city-wide grant program.

OPTIONS

Option #1 - Continue Downtown Vandalism Relief Grant Program For 2027-2031

Three funding scenarios:

Option	Annual Funding	Five-Year Cost	Estimated 2027 Property Tax Impact
1A	$20,000	$100,000	0.01%
1B	$30,000	$150,000	0.02%
1C	$50,000	$250,000	0.03%

Advantages

- Maintains original intent of the Downtown Safety Action Plan.
- Directs limited resources toward the area originally identified as experiencing elevated impacts.
- Existing administrative structure already exists.
- Predictable budget impacts.

Disadvantages

- Continues to exclude businesses outside the eligible downtown area.
- Demand may exceed available funding.
- May create perceptions of inequity amongst commercial property owners elsewhere in the city.

Option #2 – Continue Vandalism Relief Grant Program and Expand City-Wide For 2027 - 2031

Option	Annual Funding	Five-Year Cost	Estimated 2027 Property Tax Impact
2A	$50,000	$250,000	0.03%
2B	$75,000	$375,000	0.04%
2C	$100,000	$500,000	0.06%

Advantages

- Makes assistance available to all eligible businesses and commercial property owners.
- Recognizes that vandalism and property crime are not exclusively downtown issues.
- Provides equitable access to municipal support programs.

Disadvantages

- Larger applicant pool may substantially increase demand.
- Funding may be exhausted earlier in the year without increased allocations.
- Additional administrative workload may result.
- Assistance available to downtown businesses may be diluted unless funding levels are increased accordingly.

Option #3 – Conclude the Program

The program will conclude as originally intended on December 31, 2026.

Advantages

- Maintains the program's original temporary nature and planned conclusion.
- Avoids an ongoing property tax impact associated with extending the program.

Disadvantages

- Removes a source of financial assistance that has been fully subscribed each year since the program was established.
- Businesses would be responsible for the full cost of eligible vandalism-related losses.
- May be viewed as reducing support for businesses continuing to experience vandalism, break-ins and related property crime.

CONCLUSION

The Vandalism Relief Grant Program was established in 2022 as a temporary measure to support downtown businesses and property owners experiencing vandalism and related property crime. Since its establishment, the program has remained fully subscribed and has evolved in response to the demand demonstrated.

Council is now being asked to consider the future of the program, including whether to conclude the program as originally intended, continue the existing downtown-focused program for an additional five years, or expand the program city-wide to eligible businesses and commercial property owners for a five-year period.