

## **CITY OF NANAIMO**

### **BUSINESS CASE – Community Connect: Enhanced Downtown Safety Program**

#### **CURRENT OVERVIEW**

Safety and security in the downtown core is top of mind for Council and the general public. Council's 2019-2022 Strategic Plan notes a commitment to public safety and at Council's 2020-AUG-19 GPC meeting, downtown safety was identified as one of five key areas of action. The COVID-19 pandemic that started in March of 2020 has further eroded the perception of downtown safety.

The City currently provides security in the downtown core during the day with the presence of bylaw officers. In the evening, a private security company protects the downtown parkades and key City infrastructure at a cost of \$134,500 per annum.

A group of property owners from the Old City Quarter wrote to Council on 2020-MAY-19 requesting help from the City in restoring security and pride of place in their downtown neighbourhood. Council directed Staff at the 2020-MAY-25 meeting to return with a Staff report outlining a framework and funding strategy to restore security and pride of place in the Old City Quarter.

Council endorsed a pilot program targeted within the Old City Quarter at the 2020-JUN-22 meeting. The program included the introduction of private security patrols working from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. to protect property, a central helpline for residents/businesses to call to report concerns, a summer ambassador program, and enhanced cleaning services provided through the John Howard Society during the day. The 6 month program required a \$134,500 contribution from the City.

The program was branded as 'Community Connect'. The key lessons learned from the program are as follows:

- the pilot program is improving safety in the study area;
- nighttime patrols are key to discouraging illegal activities;
- morning/daytime safety patrol presence is necessary to support business owners/clients;
- security needs to remain a primary focus;
- safety needs to be a downtown wide strategy; and
- sustained funding requires a Special Area Levy to ensure all property owners are participating equitably.

The pilot project results were presented to Council at the 2020-NOV-18 Finance and Audit Meeting. The Old City Quarter Health and Safety Alliance asked that the program be extended geographically with funding provided through a Special Area Levy for the broader downtown core.

Community Connect have asked that Council 'bridge' the first 6 months of the expanded downtown program with a grant of \$147,000 with an additional contribution of \$582,750 on an annual basis from 2021.

## **BUSINESS ISSUE**

Downtown has seen significant public and private investment in the last decade which has brought with it the critical mass needed to be a resilient and attractive hub for the community. Concerns about safety impact investment decisions and discourage people from shopping, living and working in the downtown. Downtown needs to be a safe to encourage investment.

The RCMP, City Bylaw Officers and contracted security are all working to ensure a safe environment in the downtown core. Additional resources are needed to cope with the surge of public disorder created through the COVID19 Pandemic.

At the moment, it is unclear if existing public and private resources are being used efficiently to provide the most effective outcome.

## **EXPECTED OUTCOME**

Addressing public safety in the wider downtown core will:

- Mitigate negative impacts of the City's vulnerable population on business owners and residents while supported housing solutions are developed;
- Provide an enhanced level of safety for downtown residents and visitors at night; and
- Provide a more coordinated and cost effective approach to security in the downtown core.

## **OPTIONS**

**Option #1 – Prepare a comprehensive Security Plan for downtown Nanaimo while increasing evening security contract to \$300,000 per annum.**

Under this option, Council will increase the existing \$134,500 annual contribution to downtown security to \$300,000 to provide a wider coverage of downtown. At the same time, staff will work with a consultant to prepare a comprehensive security plan for the entire downtown core (\$50,000) within the first 6 months of 2021. The Security Plan would look at options to redeploy existing Bylaw and Private security resources while working with the RCMP to meet the current service gaps. The Security Plan will involve a broad consultation effort and examine best practice from comparable communities. The Plan will make recommendations on how new investments can be have the greatest impact. This will place Council in a better position to address requests relating to security by late spring 2021 and develop business cases for 2022.

Benefits:

- Improves immediate security presence in the entire downtown core.
- Addresses Council commitment to downtown safety with the development of a Security Plan that has consultation and buy-in from the newly formed Business Improvement Association, nonprofits and the general public.
- Undertakes a comprehensive review of existing resources and ensures new investments will have a net positive impact based on best practice.
- Presents a clear plan to protect public and private infrastructure on an ongoing basis.

Weaknesses:

- Community Connect volunteer team may be unsupportive of this option as they will need to self-fund security until the downtown Security Plan is complete.

- Council would need to identify funding sources for the recommendations from the Security Plan for the 2022 budget year.

#### Financial Analysis:

- Increases the City's commitment to downtown security to \$300,000 from \$134,500 per annum.
- Total Cost of the Security Plan is estimated to be \$50,000.
- The City's funding of the Community Connect Program would not be continued in 2021.
- Additional security costs (2022+) would be determined through the Security Plan.

#### **Option #2 – Provide bridge funding of \$147,000 for the first 6 months to Community Connect in 2021 while a comprehensive Security Plan is prepared for downtown**

Under this option, Council will provide a grant of \$147,000 to Community Connect to operate an expanded evening security program until June 30, 2021. At the same time, staff would work with a consultant to prepare a comprehensive security plan for the entire downtown core (\$50,000). The Security Plan would look at options to redeploy existing Bylaw and Private security resources while working with the RCMP to meet the current service gaps. The Security Plan will involve a broad consultation effort and examine best practice from comparable communities. The Plan will make recommendations on how new investments can have the greatest impact. This will place Council in a better position to address requests relating to security by late spring 2021.

#### Benefits:

- Enhanced safety and security for the Old City Quarter for the first 6 months of 2021.
- Addresses Council commitment to downtown safety with the development of a Security Plan that has consultation and buy-in from the newly formed Business Improvement Association, nonprofits and the general public.
- Undertakes a comprehensive review of existing resources and ensures new investments will have a net positive impact based on best practice.
- Presents a clear plan to protect public and private infrastructure on an ongoing basis.

#### Weaknesses:

- Downtown property owners are in the process of establishing a new Business Improvement Association to market downtown. There may not be support for an additional levy.
- Council would need to identify funding sources for the recommendations from the Security Plan which may be challenging half way through a fiscal year.

#### Financial Analysis:

- Total Cost is estimated to be \$197,000
- The six-month extension to the Community Connect Program is \$147,000
- The cost to develop a Security Plan is estimated to be \$50,000.
- Additional costs (July – December 2021) would be determined through the Security Plan and require Council to find funding at that time.

**Option #3 – Provide bridge funding of \$147,000 in 2021 with an annual commitment of \$582,750 per annum starting in 2021.**

Under this option, Council would provide a grant of \$147,000 to Community Connect to operate an expanded evening security program in the downtown core for the first six months of 2021. At the same time, staff would work to establish a Special Levy Area for the downtown core that would provide a sustainable revenue source to provide enhanced security. The goal would be to establish the new Levy Area prior to July 1, 2021. If the Levy Area was successful in being established, the pilot program would be extended to the wider downtown core.

Community Connect has asked that Council match the funds raised through the Special Levy Area for the term of the agreement (3 years). The annual City contribution is estimated to be \$582,750.

**Benefits:**

- Enhanced safety and security for the wider downtown core
- Addresses Council commitment to downtown safety
- Ability to terminate the commitment at the end of the Special Area Levy should downtown safety concerns abate after three years.

**Weaknesses:**

- Permanent increase to the operating budget for security for 2021,2022, 2023
- May not be viewed favourably by the wider downtown community who have just established a Business Improvement Association to help market and advocate for their interests.

**Financial Analysis:**

The annual impact of this program is:

- \$729,750 in 2021
- \$582,750 in 2022
- \$582,750 in 2023

**Option #4 – Maintain Status Quo**

**Benefits:**

- No increase to operating budgets

**Weaknesses:**

- Perception of downtown safety will likely get worse
- Investment decisions are likely to be deferred until safety concerns are addressed.
- Community Connect volunteer team may become disinterested as this option is viewed as unsupportive.
- City may need to ask for additional assistance from the RCMP and Bylaw Officers who are operating at capacity to increase their level of service. The City may need to hire additional security services to fill the gap.

**Financial Analysis:**

N/A

**RECOMMENDATION**

Option #1 is recommended