

May 1, 2018

City to open Safer Downtown office, add bylaw officer and build connections with public working group

Campbell River City Council has approved new resources and endorsed a Safer Downtown plan to set expectations for behaviour and help connect people in need with social services.

The plan includes setting up an office in a highly visible, publicly accessible location on Shoppers Row that will house the City's bylaw department and provide a checkpoint for RCMP officers and a base for downtown patrol officers working seven days a week through Footprints Security.

The City will also hire an additional bylaw officer to focus more resources on complaints and concerns related to unsafe activity – and to connect and collaborate with social service agency representatives working at street level.

The plan also calls for a group of community representatives to recommend opportunities for improvement.

“The Safer Downtown plan outlines immediate steps that balance the need for enforcement and support. The resources Council has committed will help reinforce acceptable behaviour downtown, and provide support, by doing what we can to help connect vulnerable people to social services – to improve safety for everyone,” says city manager Deborah Sargent. *“The Safer Downtown office will help ensure initial results are visible, with a safer downtown established by summer.”*

“All indications are that unsafe or inappropriate activity downtown will continue without some form of deliberate intervention,” says Mayor Andy Adams. *“Based on feedback from people working and living downtown, Council has endorsed a plan to increase resources, including more foot patrols, and to help build connections between social service providers and people in need.”*

The plan was created by an experienced public safety consultant based on interviews with representatives from the library, Downtown BIA, tourism, Tyee Plaza and Harbourside Inn, as well as discussions with Council and the RCMP. Recommendations from these interviews and from reports by the RCMP crime prevention analyst are included in the plan. A second round of interviews will take place with social service agencies to establish more collaborative connections among social service providers.

The working group, to be set up within the next two months and will represent diverse interests (from downtown businesses, public facilities and social service providers) to review recommendations from the RCMP and downtown representatives.

“We recognize that long-term improvements require solutions based on a collaborative approach that brings together enforcement and social support. The working group will build strong connections between social service providers, public facilities and downtown businesses to consider options from various perspectives. We expect the group will generate other ideas as well – and advise on which recommendations to act on in the medium and longer term to best establish a more welcoming downtown,” says deputy city manager Ron Neufeld.

“Council sincerely appreciates the ongoing work of social service agencies helping at street level, and the efforts of staff and Councillor Ron Kerr to encourage collaboration among these groups. Just recently, we welcomed an update from Radiant Life Church that they will extend the use of their facility as an indoor location for the Grassroots Kind Hearts dinner program. The City will continue to provide support for this program for another six months, to everyone's benefit,” adds Mayor Adams.

To ensure the Safer Downtown initiative is generating desired results, the plan includes regular monitoring, measuring and reporting to Council.

The Safer Downtown initiative will be paid for with funding from the City's gaming reserve. These funds come from a percentage of proceeds generated through lottery and casino revenue rather than from property taxation. Costs for 2018 cover are anticipated to be \$176,000, which pays for an additional bylaw officer, office space lease and one-time workstation and security installations as well as working group set-up. Costs for 2019 and 2020 are estimated at \$129,000.

“Funding the Safer Downtown initiative from the gaming reserve is in line with Council's policy to use this revenue to support sport, recreation and social causes and Council's strategic priorities,” Neufeld adds.

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