

Report

Date September 21, 2022
Subject Safer Community Plan Review and Next Steps

File:

PURPOSE

Further review of the Safer Community Plan initiative.

BACKGROUND

The Safer Community Plan Review and Next Steps meeting between Duncan and North Cowichan staff and elected officials occurred on March 7, 2022. RCMP Inspector Chris Bear attended the meeting. Meeting attendees discussed the Safer Community Plan, and subsequently, on March 21, 2022, Duncan City Council passed three resolutions along with five additional items of discussion. The City of Duncan is waiting for recommendations from North Cowichan Council on these matters. On May 4th, at their regular meeting, Council resolved that:

- (1) In partnership with the City of Duncan, authorizes the City of Duncan to issue a request for proposals to extend the Security Ambassadors program for another 2-year period; and,
- (2) Authorize a contribution of up to \$15,000 to be paid to the City of Duncan to fund 50% of the additional costs for the enhanced Peer Sharps Clean-up Crew Program in partnership with the City of Duncan and the Canadian Mental Health Association; and,
- (3) Direct that the remainder of the report be sent back to staff for continued discussions with the City of Duncan on the potential for ongoing partnerships relative to the Corridor Safety Plan.

DISCUSSION

Corridor Safety Office

The Corridor Safety Office (CSO), located at 490 Trans-Canada Highway, was to be the base for North Cowichan Bylaw Officers, City of Duncan Streets & Parks Patrollers, Security Ambassadors, Cowichan Tribes Bylaw Officers, and the RCMP to meet in order to have a visible presence in the corridor area. The goal was to have a presence of security resources centred in the core area under duress. Due to the last few years of COVID protocols, the space has not been utilized as planned. The RCMP are limited in using the current space due to security issues. The City of Duncan (the "City") no longer uses the CSO, except when meetings are required with North Cowichan, RCMP or other stakeholders. We continue to have mutual aid agreements between the jurisdictions when required to support each other for calls for service. We will continue to explore ways to move forward.

Staff are continuing discussions through the Safer Working Group meetings, but joint patrols have proved to be ineffective due to the expansion of corridor issues into the Cowichan Commons and Paddle Road areas. Difficulties are brought about by the amount of time required for North Cowichan Officers to maintain a presence and be effective within the boundaries of North Cowichan.

North Cowichan pays the full amount of the lease since the departure of the City, which is approximately \$3800 per month.

Communication between the groups does still occur when required. All parties have two-way radios, due to an initiative by North Cowichan, and cell phones. This allows all groups working in the corridor a means of daily communication for ongoing issues and activities and provides an essential tool for coordinating actions if required with regard to safety for stakeholders and the public.

North Cowichan data collection of contacts made and Calls for Service has been very beneficial in determining a pattern in the types of calls and where they are happening. The workload call volume for each Officer can also be accurately tracked. Currently, the CSO is used by North Cowichan Bylaw Services staff as a morning safety briefing location and as workstations for officers to complete files, write tickets or return calls to the businesses or the public regarding outstanding files. It is also used for storage for North Cowichan bikes and patrol equipment.

There has been a requirement in North Cowichan's need for heightened patrols in line with an uptick in calls from the Cowichan Commons area due to the supportive housing that is now operational. Although the Safer Community Plan did not specifically include the Cowichan Commons area in its consideration, we must adjust our management of the homeless and disorder as new areas become problematic. The principles of the Safer Community Plan are used as guidelines for how we integrate resources into these hot spot areas of the community. A "uniformed" presence, as noted in the Safer Community Plan, is important due to the nature of enforcement duties in a challenging street environment. A combined meeting space was used periodically during the joint use of the CSO, and going forward with separate patrols further results in the need for a space that would work for North Cowichan Bylaw Services staff.

North Cowichan having a visible space more central to where the calls are in the Cowichan Commons will better serve the current needs of our community. Consideration of leasing a similar space to accommodate North Cowichan Bylaw Services staff as a stand-alone office should be considered. The building located at 490 Trans Canada has recently been sold, and it is not yet known whether the current month-to-month lease will continue.

Pro-Active Highway Bike Corridor Patrols

Since the City stopped utilizing the CSO office and the City and North Cowichan calls for service are more geographically separated from the corridor issues, North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers have been conducting corridor patrols on their own. North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers have been biking or walking the corridor for four hours per day, six days a week. The patrols completed by North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers are largely within the northern part of the corridor, along with the Cowichan Commons and Friendship Trail areas. The additional patrolling of these new areas has increased bylaw calls for service. In May, for example, North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers responded to over thirty calls for service in the Cowichan Commons area, and twelve tickets were served on individuals in the corridor for offences under the Fire Protection, Highway Use, Parks and Public Places Regulation and Traffic Bylaws. More recently, much of the City patrols center around McAdam Park, but City staff still regularly patrol the rest of the corridor within the City's boundaries.

There is, however, still a commitment between North Cowichan and City bylaw enforcement officers to provide mutual aid in the event that either needs assistance.

Resourcing our calls for service across the Municipality continues to be challenging, and when a response is required to a known high-risk event, two North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers are required to attend for safety reasons. However, two of our Bylaw Compliance Officers are temporary positions as they have been financed through the Provincial COVID funding, which will expire early in 2023. Therefore, if the Municipality does not increase the Bylaw Services staffing budget in 2023, patrolling in the corridor and other problem areas will be significantly reduced, as will Bylaw Services' ability to respond to other less urgent requests throughout the Municipality. The two temporary positions will expire in April of 2023. A request will be made during the upcoming budget process to consider transitioning these two temporary positions into permanent positions.

If the Bylaw Services department returns to a complement of two Bylaw Compliance Officers, service levels and response activities will need to be prioritized as the current levels cannot be sustained by two officers. Daily corridor patrols would have to give way to responding to bylaw calls for service. This situation needs to be considered for any future commitments made under the Safer Community Plan.

North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers patrol with RCMP bike patrol members, when their schedules align. Although this partnership is valuable and works well, resourcing from the RCMP is ever-changing and cannot be relied upon for future planning of joint patrols.

Health and Social Services Role

The Safer Community Plan recognizes the vital role of health and social service providers in the community and sees them as key partners in reducing crime and disorder. North Cowichan Bylaw Services staff work collaboratively with the health and social services stakeholder groups during corridor patrols. Members of the Substance Use Integrated Team are present in the corridor and work with Bylaw Services staff to help unsheltered people requiring assistance.

The Manager of Bylaw and Business Licensing Services meets weekly with a group representing the Cowichan Valley Wellness & Recovery Center (CVWRC), which includes staff from RCMP, Security Ambassadors, City bylaw enforcement officers, BC Ambulance, Warmland House, Cowichan Tribes, mental health team and outreach and harm reduction workers. This group deals with many shared concerns and issues emerging from the daily activities along the corridor and is largely action-oriented.

This group has proven to be very successful in dealing with daily issues and working collaboratively to solve problems that often involve more than one agency. This particular working group has proven to be more successful than the existing Safer Working Group that continues to meet monthly. Going forward, it may be more productive to continue with this group, as opposed to the Safer Working Group.

The Manager of Bylaw and Business Licensing Services is on the Cowichan Community Action Team (CCAT), which meets once a month and is part of the CVWRC Community Advisory Committee that meets quarterly. The CCAT is a larger group that focuses on the health and well-being of individuals who use substances to reduce stigma and increase awareness and safety. BC Housing and the Lookout

Health and Housing Society recently set up a Community Advisory Committee that will meet monthly, and the Manager of Bylaw and Business Licensing Services represents North Cowichan on this Committee. The Manager of Bylaw and Business Licensing Services is also part of the Cowichan Valley Integration Response Team that meets bi-monthly and deals with individuals brought forward by the team using the Situation Table model.

The relocation in November of 2021 of the CVWRC from 221 Trunk Road, within the City of Duncan to 5878 York Road, in North Cowichan, has increased activity and public disorder in the York Road area. The opening of a supportive housing building located at 6428 Paddle Road has also increased activity resulting in increased bylaw calls for service in the Cowichan Commons and Friendship Trail areas. Due to these recent changes, North Cowichan Bylaw Compliance Officers patrol both the corridor area and the noted area of increased activity. The increased activity in the Paddle Road area resulted in thirty service calls in May 2022.

Crime Prevention through Environment Design (CPTED)

Recently a business located along York Road removed a large, long hedge to increase sightlines and discourage unsheltered people from camping or leaving debris. Businesses and North Cowichan continually use fencing to discourage similar activities in certain areas of the Municipality. With the increase in activity in the Cowichan Commons area, the RCMP and North Cowichan Bylaw have offered CPTED advice to many business owners.

Going Forward

Patrolling:

The current model of separate patrols is working well. The North Cowichan corridor area, along with other North Cowichan areas are, receiving more coverage with two North Cowichan Bylaw Officers six days a week, and it appears that the City is completing patrols in active areas within City boundaries. Bylaw enforcement officers from the City and North Cowichan assist Cowichan Tribes when needed and also assist the Security Ambassadors when required. This structure of patrolling helps deliver street-level enforcement for the residents, business owners, and property owners for both the corridor area and North Cowichan.

Sharps program:

The need for garbage, waste and needle pick-up was identified in the Safer Community Plan. It was also included as a recommended action (#4) in the Safer Community Plan to consider a way for communities to address this problem collaboratively. The Peers Sharps Collection Team program is operated by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Island Health provides the base funding for this program, which covers one crew member for three hours per day, three days per week. The enhanced program, additional hours and a vehicle to allow for garbage pick up, was funded until March 31, 2022, through a Community Action Initiative Wellness and Harm Reduction Grant received by the City. The recent funding commitment from both the City and North Cowichan has allowed the enhanced program to continue until January 2023. They have successfully removed a large number of needles and garbage, along with offering employment to clients from the Warmland House. This program is valuable and should continue to be funded.

Security Ambassadors

The Safer Community Plan, considered by staff as one of the most effective tools to address public disorder, was to hire a contracted private security firm to provide "Security Ambassadors" to work in the corridor during daytime hours. The Security Ambassadors were to be the "eyes" on the street, enabling the RCMP and Bylaw Services' staff to respond to concerns based on immediate information when incidents occurred. They were to communicate and engage with the street population and to help them understand the health and social services resources available, support the work of street-outreach workers, represent the community in an ambassadorial way, and work in a respectful manner.

The intent was to provide an individual that was highly visible who could create relationships with the street entrenched people and direct the homeless and businesses to appropriate resources to address any issues. The individual would follow the same guidelines as established in the "who do you call brochure" or direct persons to Bylaw Compliance Officers and RCMP in a tiered approach, easing the workload for the overextended RCMP.

There must be a consistent (one or two) Security Ambassador(s) in order to develop respectful relations with all stakeholders, street entrenched people, business owners, enforcement personnel, the public, neighbours and visitors alike.

The funding provided by Island Health for patrols includes school checks and a static guard at the CVWRC. A new security contractor has been awarded the contract and is able to provide staffing that works in a way that is considered acceptable for the Safer Community Plan, including identifying the expectations and duties of the Security Ambassador's role and reviewing shift times. The patrol hours at the CVWRC are 7:00 am to 4:00 pm and again 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm weekdays. Stats and weekends are 7:00 am to 4:30 pm and 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm. We will continue to work with the City and Island Health should these hours need to be adjusted to meet identified gaps in managing the disorder. Based on experiences to date, it has become evident that late evening and early morning patrols work best for the tiered approach to the corridor. North Cowichan Bylaw Services currently patrol during the day.

OPTIONS

1. (Recommended Option) THAT Council:

- (1) Terminate the existing lease for the Community Safety Office located at 490 Trans-Canada Highway; and,
 - (2) Direct staff to look for a different location for the Community Safety Office within North Cowichan's boundaries that will allow for continued safety patrols within the corridor and the areas around the Cowichan Commons and the Friendship Trail.
- While the Bylaw Services department firmly believes that the CSO could work as it was initially planned in the Safer Community Plan, staff believe the funds could be better allocated to lease a smaller office for use by North Cowichan Bylaw Services staff with intermittent RCMP presence. This would maintain a heightened visual presence on the Highway Corridor and in the newly affected area of Cowichan Commons.

IMPLICATIONS

- The ability to have a centralized physical location has been vital to North Cowichan's success in the corridor.
- The lack of an office and a physical presence by local bylaw officers could have a significant visual and perceived security impact on the businesses and residents in the corridor. The feedback from businesses and residents within the corridor indicates that daily presence by bylaw officers is needed.
- The lack of a physical presence will further perceptions within the community that the Municipality of North Cowichan and its Council don't care and are doing nothing to help the situation.
- The Cowichan Commons has and will continue to take more of the Officer's time, and both North Cowichan and the City of Duncan would be better served operating solely in their respective areas.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council:

- (1) Terminate the existing lease for the Community Safety Office located at 490 Trans-Canada Highway; and,
- (2) Direct staff to look for a different location for the Community Safety Office within North Cowichan's boundaries that will allow for continued safety patrols within the corridor and the areas around the Cowichan Commons and the Friendship Trail.

Report prepared by:

Kim Ferris

Kim Ferris
Manager, Bylaw and Business Licensing Services

Report reviewed by:

Martin Drakeley

Martin Drakeley
Fire Chief and Senior Manager Fire and Bylaw Services

Approved to be forwarded to Council:



Ted Swabey
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

- (1) Safer Community Plan