

Report

Date April 3, 2024
Subject Safer Community Plan

File:

PURPOSE

To provide direction to staff on whether to continue to implement the recommended actions under the Safer Community Plan or to initiate the development of a new plan.

BACKGROUND

In 2019, arising from crime and public disorder concerns, North Cowichan and the City of Duncan commissioned security consultant R. Churchill to develop a plan to enhance safety for the general public in the Cowichan Valley. Subsequently, at a regular Council meeting on July 17, 2019, Council adopted the Safer Community Plan. The plan included 7 "Recommended Actions" and focused mainly on the "corridor" – that portion of the Trans-Canada Highway between Silver Bridge and the Somenos Marsh. Council received an update in 2021 that assessed progress on each of the seven actions.

In June 2023, Council held an in-camera workshop on managing the corridor's homelessness, mental health, and addiction issues. Council recommendations arising from that workshop (Safer Corridor Improvement Strategies) were the subject of a Council report on September 26, 2023, that outlined the steps required to implement the strategies, including targeted advocacy requests to the provincial and federal governments. All the strategies in that report are actively underway, completed, or still under active consideration:

- A new Open Drug Use Bylaw.
- A strengthened Sidewalk & Parks Bylaw.
- A strengthened Nuisance Enforcement Bylaw.
- A plan for 24/7 bylaw staffing and deployment to assist with safety in the Corridor.
- Consider additional marsh patrols.
- Consider hiring a social planner.
- Consider implementing a clean team.
- Consider implementing nighttime security.
- Continue to explore coordination and partnerships with other jurisdictions.
- Consider reinstating the Community Safety Office.
- Consider partnership to achieve marsh patrols.
- Consider a new model for community policing.

At a January 23 joint Council meeting of North Cowichan and the City of Duncan, the respective Councils directed staff to review the Safer Community Plan 2019 to determine whether revising or updating it is required.

In February and March 2024, staff reviewed the Safer Community Plan with stakeholders, including City of Duncan Bylaw staff, North Cowichan Bylaw staff, the Safer Working Group, Cowichan Tribes Public Safety Working Group, the Cowichan Homelessness and Housing Coalition, the Wellness and Recovery Community Health and Safety team, the South Cowichan Community Policing Society, and the RCMP North Cowichan Detachment.

DISCUSSION

All stakeholders agreed that the Safer Community Plan 2019 has been largely completed and does not warrant revising or adjusting. They were also open to participating in the creation of a new plan that provides clear, pragmatic, and effective direction going forward.

The seven recommendations in the Safer Community Plan are:

- 1) Joint Local Government – Safer Working Group
- 2) Corridor Safety Office
- 3) Address impacts on business and the highway corridor
- 4) Health and Social Service roles
- 5) Crime Reduction – Crime Analyst
- 6) Crime Prevention through Environmental Design
- 7) Dealing with problem properties

The status of those recommendations are:

- 1) Joint Local Government – Safer Working Group
 - ✓ Operational and meeting regularly
- 2) Corridor Safety Office
 - ✓ Tried, deemed ineffective, closed
- 3) Address impact on business and the highway corridor
 - ✓ Ongoing
- 4) Health and Social Service roles
 - ✓ Collaboration and partnerships with social service agencies and provincial ministries are ongoing.
- 5) Crime Reduction – Crime Analyst
 - ✓ Completed
- 6) Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CEPTED)
 - ✓ Initial CEPTED work done, ongoing with a variety of stakeholders
- 7) Dealing with problem properties
 - ✓ Nuisance property bylaws in place (Bylaw No. 3804) insufficient volume to warrant a nuisance properties process addressing sites associated with public disorder.

OPTIONS

1. **(Recommended Option)** THAT Council direct staff to undertake a collaborative process to develop a new Safer Community Plan that addresses crime, public safety, public disorder, and the impacts of addiction and mental health crisis on our community, and that staff return to Council with a draft version of that report for consideration.
 - *Consultation with community stakeholders, including the business community, residents, RCMP, social agencies, provincial ministry staff, local government officials, and homeless individuals, would be the basis of any proposed plan of action. The resulting plan is expected to be short, simple, and focused.*
2. THAT Council direct staff to continue operationalizing the current Safer Community Plan and to continue implementing the Safer Corridor Improvement Strategies.
 - *All the activities contemplated in these two documents are underway.*

IMPLICATIONS

Council is likely aware that the social issues which underly the Safer Community Plan report and corridor recommendations are still visibly and persistently present in our community. The decision to resource a Social Planning function within North Cowichan suggests a continued focus by Council on ameliorating the impact on our community of homelessness, mental health, and addictions.

The recommended option to engage with the community and create a new vision of how to tackle these problems effectively does not carry immediate financial implications but does provide an opportunity to engage with residents and the business community on a subject that is very topical. An effective response will likely have a heavy emphasis on social and health services that would be wholly within provincial jurisdiction.

Consultation with the province and federal governments is recommended to maximize the financial support they provide to our community to address these issues. Local governments that actively engage and partner with senior levels of government to address these issues are more likely to see investments in their community.

It can be confidently asserted that we will need to be creative, bold, and action-oriented to have an impact. This means that innovative solutions and new ways of thinking about these issues will likely emerge from the proposed planning process.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council direct staff to undertake a collaborative process to develop a new Safer Community Plan which addresses crime, public safety, public disorder and the impacts of the addictions and mental health crisis on our community, and that staff return to Council with a draft version of that report for consideration.

Report prepared by:



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Approved to be forwarded to Council:



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Attachment:

(1) Safer Community Plan Recommendations