



PUBLIC INPUT OPPORTUNITY ON HOMELESSNESS AND RELATED ISSUES



September 3,
2019

A Summary of What We Heard
and Our Responses

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A SUMMARY OF WHAT WE HEARD AND OUR RESPONSES

The City of Terrace would like to thank all the citizens and organizations that came to the September 3, 2019, public input opportunity to talk about homelessness and related issues in the community. The turnout was impressive and the respectful tone of the dialogue made for a constructive and civilized meeting.

We have organized the many suggestions that we received into themes. Each theme includes a bulleted list of the suggestions we received on that theme. Then, we have provided our responses to these themes and the specific comments they included. Much of what we have heard is related to the pressures from economic development in the region.

SECURITY

- **Hire more RCMP members.**
- **Proactively enforce the bylaws we currently have.**
- **Hire private security to patrol the downtown and residential areas every night.**
- **RCMP should train Neighbourhood Watch Volunteers so they can operate safely.**
- **Detain repeat offenders instead of issuing fines.**
- **Relocate chronic offenders to another community with more supports.**
- **Install monitored surveillance cameras in the downtown.**

The request for more security, in the form of additional RCMP members, bylaw compliance officers, and/or private security was a predominant theme.

The Terrace RCMP detachment is composed of municipally funded RCMP members and provincially funded RCMP members, as well as municipal and provincial support staff. The City made a request through the Province to the Federal government that the number of municipally funded RCMP members at the Terrace detachment be increased by 3 members. This request was approved and the

authorized strength for municipal members in the Terrace Detachment was officially raised from 25 to 28. It will take some time for the RCMP to be able to provide these new members, but they are in process. Each additional municipal member costs the taxpayer about \$130,000 annually, which is just shy of a 1% tax increase. The City of Terrace currently budgets for 24 members and will adjust our budget when needed to accommodate additional members. For a number of reasons (i.e., maternity/paternity leaves, sick leave, transfer delays, etc.), the RCMP is generally unable to staff the full authorized strength. The increase in member numbers should allow us to have the “boots on the ground” that we are budgeting for.

The City has been appealing to the Province since 2015 to increase the number of provincially funded members at the Terrace RCMP detachment. There are currently 7 provincially funded members to support the vast rural area covered by our detachment, which is inadequate. We met again with the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General at the Union of BC Municipalities annual convention in September 2019 to continue to press this issue.

The City hired an additional bylaw compliance officer for a four-month period this year over the busy spring and summer seasons. This additional officer gave support to the full-time bylaw compliance officer we currently have on staff and provided additional bylaw response during evenings and weekends. The cost for a bylaw compliance officer is approximately \$90,000 annually. This estimate does not include the cost of a vehicle or other resulting expenses. Currently because of staffing limitations, bylaw infractions are mainly handled with a complaint-driven approach instead of proactive enforcement (i.e., patrolling and seeking out infractions). The City has made an effort to be more proactive in the downtown core and create a more visual presence there. Increasing the number of bylaw compliance officers will be considered during budget deliberations for 2020.

The Terrace Downtown Improvement Area Society (TDIA) hired downtown security this year as a pilot project. The City contributed \$20,000 to this project. During budget deliberations this fall, Council will be considering the efficacy of this service and whether to continue to fund it at some level for 2020.

While the RCMP does not provide training to Neighbourhood Watch groups, it can provide guidance to citizens who want to receive crime prevention tips.

Offenders are detained by the RCMP for a number of reasons. As part of natural justice they cannot detain people for extended periods of time. Similarly, it is not legal to detain people and send them to another community.

Council has investigated the feasibility of unmonitored surveillance cameras in the downtown but the evidence suggests this is not an effective way to deter criminal and unwanted behaviour.

LEGAL SYSTEM

- **Make Crown Counsel press charges.**
- **Direct judges to give full sentences or give addicted offenders the option of mandatory treatment instead of jail time.**

City Council doesn't have the authority to make Crown Counsel press charges. That is a decision made by the Crown. Crown Counsel has a quasi-judicial function and their responsibilities are described in the Crown Counsel Act. Their decisions are made free from government and political interference.

Council has requested a meeting with the Crown to express the concerns we have received regarding the perception that the Crown is reluctant to press charges. Directing Crown Counsel or the Judiciary is outside the City's authority.

HEALTH SYSTEM

- **Mills Memorial Hospital should hire security so they don't rely on the RCMP.**
- **Provide a safe injection site.**
- **Re-evaluate the needle exchange program.**

Council recently brought some of these concerns to the attention of Northern Health, which is a health authority within the Provincial government. Mills Memorial Hospital now has security in place 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Northern Health supports a harm reduction approach as the best model for people with addictions. Northern Health distributed approximately 58,000 needles in Terrace last year. In a recent meeting with Northern Health officials they were confident that the benefit to our public health by supplying needles outweighs the possibility of harm from discarded needles.

Council has discussed with Northern Health the suggestion of an overdose prevention site to be established in Terrace. An overdose prevention site is similar to a safe injection site but does not have the same medical staff or level of services. An overdose prevention site would help to reduce the number of discarded needles and keep people safer. Such a facility would be established by another agency, not by the City.

The City has contributed significant resources to keeping our community safe and clean, and handling discarded drug paraphernalia. This past year we have spent approximately \$75,000 on cleaning up needles, litter, and human excrement, as well as additional clean-up of public washrooms, parks, and homeless camps.

HOUSING

- Encourage higher density and more housing options in the community.
- Build seniors' housing.
- Build small modular homes for the homeless and provide employment opportunities and support services.
- Require rental control to make rental units more affordable.
- Review rights for landlords.
- Apply for federal funding to build more housing.
- Provide housing and shelter for people who wish to remain sober. Provide employment opportunities for residents of a shelter. Provide housing where the residents contribute some physical labour to build the housing.
- Improve the security around Sonder House and clear the bush around the area.
- Council should attend the BC Non-Profit Housing Association's Housing Central Conference.
- Examine how other jurisdictions have responded to homelessness.

While it is not the City's mandate or responsibility to build or supply housing—it is the responsibility of the Province—we do have a role to play encouraging housing in Terrace. Numerous presenters at the event on September 3 talked about the rental market, expressed the need for more housing options in the community, and presented options for building housing. Rent controls and the rights of residents and landlords are not within the City's control.

The City has been examining the housing stock available in the community and making changes to encourage a more diverse housing supply in Terrace. Since 2008 there has been at least one City struck committee at any given time doing work regarding housing.

We have been encouraging higher density in the community through a number of mechanisms. Zoning changes to permit secondary suites in all residential zones and additional zones for higher density have been adopted.

While the City does not build houses, it does support housing projects and has supported projects for seniors such as the Tuck Avenue Seniors' Housing project (by initiating the expansion of the number of units), Market Estates seniors housing (by waiving the Offsite Development Charges), Ksan Society's affordable housing project on Haugland (by providing land); and the Rapid Response to Homelessness project on Olson Avenue (by providing land).

Council established an Affordable Housing Reserve Fund. Ksan Society received \$250,000 of that fund for their affordable housing project on Haugland, and Terrace and District Community Services Society

received \$100,000 for their low-income housing project at the former Cedars Motel. The City will be updating our housing needs assessment in 2020 to review the housing needs of our community.

We have shared the concerns raised regarding security at Sonder House with Ksan Society, which is the operator of this facility. The Sonder House project is not yet complete; work has been ongoing since the Public Forum date. We continue to work with BC Housing to reach final completion on site development, which includes landscaping and gazebos for outdoor seating at the rear of the building.

The end of Olson Avenue is municipal parklands, so we did some brushing, clearing, and tree removal earlier in the year as the project got underway. While it is not feasible within our budget to maintain this area as open park space, this location is also the proposed TORCA and City “Courthouse Trails Project.” If funding is secured and this project occurs, it is anticipated the area will be brushed and opened up for mountain bike use. This is expected to increase positive activity and public use in these parklands.

The City is a member of the BC Non-Profit Housing Association. Staff and Council have attended their annual conferences for a number of years.

The City is open to looking at how other jurisdictions respond to housing, homelessness, and addiction.

MORE SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

- **More mental health services available in Terrace. Use financial incentives to attract professionals. Hire more professional staff at social service agencies.**
- **Improve coordination between service providers.**
- **Establish a detox centre and a second stage facility in Terrace.**
- **Build a public washroom and shower facility in the downtown. Have laundry facilities for street people to use.**
- **Provide funding for more services like soup kitchens.**
- **Support the Northern Women’s Recovery House Society’s project.**
- **Lobby for the re-establishment of mental health institutions.**
- **Terrace needs a safe place for people to access on the weekends.**
- **Establish a safe place to reside when the extreme weather shelter is closed.**
- **Generate a contact list for downtown businesses so they don’t have to call the RCMP.**
- **Provide training or services for downtown businesses regarding how to deal with people who may have mental health issues and/or addictions.**
- **Cut all services and force homeless people to find employment.**
- **Have more services and activities for youth.**

While health care is also a Provincial responsibility and outside of the mandate of the City, Council has been lobbying for decades for improved access to detox and addictions treatment for the northwest region. We also met with the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions at the Union of BC Municipalities annual convention in September 2019 to share the suggestions related to social services to the agencies that deliver them. We will continue to lobby for these services.

The Homelessness Intervention Program (HIP) was formed from recommendations from the City’s Homelessness Task Group to help coordinate services between agencies. The HIP is composed of service agencies who meet regularly to assist the chronically homeless. There is the possibility of expanding the HIP to become the Situation Table, which would provide expanded services like some of those mentioned in the suggestions above.

The washrooms in George Little Park were open to the public from 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. during the summer months. The facility was damaged several times during the summer as people were vandalizing and attempting to live in the bathrooms. The City continues to look at options to improve this situation.

OTHER COMMENTS

- **Education system should recognize children with different learning abilities.**
- **Separate from Canada and British Columbia and use the tax revenue to address social issues.**
- **Don't make assumptions about people.**
- **Remain open to dialogue within the community.**
- **Consult with other jurisdictions, with First Nations, and with LNG/oil and gas industry regarding best practices.**

The City does look at other communities to learn how they are handling homelessness, addictions, and mental health challenges. Each community is different but there are lessons to be learned from how other communities address these challenges. The City does talk to the LNG industry regarding the impacts of LNG and best practices to mitigate the negative social impacts of this type of development. The City participates in the Social Management Roundtable for the LNG Canada project.

CLOSING REMARKS

Thank you to everyone who attended, presented on September 3, or wrote in with their suggestions. As noted in many of the sections above, our next steps have involved discussing a variety of topics at the Union of BC Municipalities annual convention, ongoing discussions with relevant ministries in Victoria, and continued communications with other stakeholders.

We will continue to update residents, businesses, and other stakeholders as progress is made.