

DATE: April 4, 2023

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Adam Davey, Director of Public Safety

SUBJECT: Lower Patricia encampment: Enhanced security options & supporting the Province's new "Homes For People" action plan, to close encampments

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATIONS:

THAT Council:

1. DIRECTS Administration to pursue "Option 1 – 12-hour overnight patrols within the vicinity of Lower Patricia (7pm to 7am)" on a trial basis for the remainder of 2023, as described in the report dated April 4, 2023, entitled, "Lower Patricia encampment: Enhanced security options & supporting the Province's new "Homes For People" action plan, to close encampments," from the Director of Public Safety;
2. AUTHORIZES Administration to install No-Post concrete barriers along the accessway at Lower Patricia to ensure emergency vehicle access, as described in the report dated April 4, 2023, entitled, "Lower Patricia encampment: Enhanced security options & supporting the Province's new "Homes For People" action plan, to close encampments," from the Director of Public Safety;
3. POSTPONES consideration of final reading and adoption of proposed "City of Prince George Parks and Open Space Bylaw No. 7370, 2002, Amendment Bylaw No. 9389, 2023" to a future regular Council meeting, following Council's direction to Administration regarding the enhanced security options; AND
4. ENDORSES the Province's new "Homes for People" action plan that includes "more homes to support people experiencing homelessness" and "new actions to close encampments" by offering Prince George to serve as a pilot community to implement the new Provincial response teams and housing as soon as possible.

PURPOSE:

This report is in response to Council direction to provide enhanced security options for the centralized approach to encampments, located at Lower Patricia and within the vicinity of Lower Patricia in the Millar Addition neighbourhood and downtown. At the March 13, 2023 regular meeting, the following resolution was passed unanimously by Council:

“That Council DIRECTS Administration to return a report to a Regular Council Meeting to coincide with consideration of final reading of the “Parks and Open Space Bylaw No. 7370, 2002, Amendment Bylaw No. 9389, 2023” providing options to increase RCMP presence in the Millar Addition neighbourhood and downtown, and options for regular private security patrols of the same area.”

To comply with Council’s direction, Administration has included the proposed Parks and Open Space Amendment Bylaw No. 9389 on the April 12 council meeting agenda. However, as noted in the above recommendation, Administration recommends that Council postpone consideration of final reading of proposed amendment Bylaw No. 9389 to a future regular Council meeting, following Council’s direction to Administration regarding the enhanced security options presented in this report.

The options outlined in this report form part of the City’s passive approach to encampment management, as homelessness, mental health and drug addiction are not within the purview of local government. The City continues to support the Province in fulfilling their responsibility to provide suitable housing and supports for the unhoused population.¹

To this end, the Province of British Columbia unveiled the new “Homes for People” action plan (available here: https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Homes_For_People.pdf) on April 3. As of this report’s writing, details are not yet available. However, the plan appears to include a comprehensive and resourced approach by providing “new actions to close encampments and more homes to support people experiencing homelessness” through the implementation of ‘Homeless Encampment Action Response Teams’ (HEART) and ‘Homeless Encampment Action Response for Temporary Housing’ (HEARTH). The City has maintained a steadfast advocacy approach to the Province, most recently with the Council-directed, third Mayor’s letter sent to the Premier (approved at the last regular meeting of March 27, 2023). This may be a timely opportunity for the City to maximize this approach for everyone involved by offering Prince George as a pilot community to test and implement these new Provincial initiatives.

The City of Prince George is ready to support the Province’s plan with immediate effect. Should Council approve Recommendation #5, Administration can rapidly pivot the strategy under development to ensure we are aligned and ready to support the Province’s plan to close encampments and provide housing.

DISCUSSION:

The following security enhancement options are specific to the City of Prince George, that are supportive of local government jurisdiction. Following upcoming discussion and planning with involved governmental organizations, a formalized strategy that is aligned with the Province’s new “Homes for People” action plan shall be brought to Council for consideration at a future meeting. These other agencies may provide additional services and supports. It is important to note that this is the first phase within a larger plan that will likely extend over many years to find more appropriate long-term housing options. The timeline to permanently shut down the Lower Patricia encampment is contingent upon the Province’s ability to fulfill its responsibility to provide suitable housing and supports to the unhoused population. The City continues to respond within our jurisdictional authority, and is

¹ Should Council opt to take on the responsibilities of the Province by exploring an active encampment management approach by providing services to the site and occupants, Administration recommends conducting a public RFP process to hire a third-party encampment management organization. Significant resources are required with this approach. Based upon the learnings of similar cities that have experienced this issue, Administration recommends a passive approach in order to allow the Province to fulfill their responsibilities, with the City serving in a support role.

supportive of the Province, BC Housing and Northern Health in fulfilling their responsibilities of housing, health, and mental health supports.

The following security enhancement options are provided for Council's consideration. The costs associated with these options, less the previously approved RCMP overtime patrols, are currently not budgeted for. To be clear, these security enhancement options are unlikely to result in a safe living environment within the Lower Patricia encampment. The encampment continues to be a hazard to human health and life safety, and the City recommends occupants use available shelter space. Enhanced security measures may provide a feeling of increased safety for nearby residents and businesses.

Enhanced security options:

RCMP Overtime Patrols:

The Prince George RCMP Detachment currently undertakes a program of enhanced patrols in the downtown core through overtime funding provided by the City of Prince George. This allows for the presence of two members conducting targeted patrols in this area on most days for a period of 8 hours. Those patrols will be directed to increase their focus on areas that are anticipated to see increased activity, including the Lower Patricia encampment area, the surrounding light industrial area and the Millar Addition. The Downtown Safety Unit consists of five full time members. This unit will likewise increase their patrols of, and presence in, those affected areas during their regularly scheduled shifts.

Recommendation: RCMP overtime patrols are already conducted as part of routine operations. No further Council direction is required to action this security enhancement.

Fencing:

Fencing costs to enclose the entire greenbelt portion of Patricia Boulevard from Queensway to the pumphouse at Hwy 16 are currently estimated at \$450,000.² These costs are for 6-foot fencing, and further costs depend on the alignment of the fence and other ancillary costs for clearing of trees and other unknowns. It would be less if only the top portion of the bank had fencing installed.

Recommendation: Administration does not recommend the installation of fencing. Currently there are two chain-link fences running parallel to the roadway. The fences continue to be damaged and dismantled for illegal use to harden occupants' dwelling-structures. The ongoing maintenance resources required to upkeep a new fence are considerable.

Emergency vehicle access:

The overall combined length of the Lower Patricia encampment roadway is approximately 740 meters. No-Post concrete barriers are 3 meters in length and allow for a 2-meter gap in between placement of the No-Posts. We would require approximately 150 No-Post concrete barriers for 740 meters of roadway coverage. These barriers are highly effective and commonly used along highways. The placement of No-Posts will ensure prompt emergency vehicle access and egress. A high-level approximate cost-estimate is currently \$80,000 for purchase and installation. On-going accessway maintenance is not included, and likely expected throughout the year. No structures or debris will be allowed on the roadway to ensure emergency vehicle access.

Recommendation: Administration recommends the installation of No-Post concrete barriers to ensure unencumbered emergency vehicle access and egress to the Lower Patricia encampment site.

² These costs are approximate, and should Council direct Administration to install fencing, a detailed cost estimate will be completed.

Private Contracted Security - Options:

These options are high-level cost estimates and require further definition of scope. The City's procurement policies are applicable to the acquisition of these contracted security services. Should Council direct Administration to procure contracted security services, it is anticipated that these services will be operational prior to summer. The City has approximately \$113,000 in Strengthening Communities Grant funding to offset these costs for 2023. This is a one-time offset, that may not be available for 2024 onward. The below options are based upon the known parameters of the Lower Patricia Encampment: total occupants of fewer than 100, confined to the geographical area. Should the numbers grow, or the situation deteriorate further, additional costs are expected. To be clear, contracted private security is a passive security measure: their role is to observe and report. They are able to contact 911 and provide an early warning. However, they do not intervene, nor will they actively manage the encampment. The security will feature along the vicinity of the encampment, to patrol the adjacent areas. A dedicated security presence to provide safety within the encampment is out of scope and capability of private security services. Semblance of safety in the encampment will continue to be provided by emergency services when 911 is called.

Option 1: 12-hour overnight patrols within the vicinity of Lower Patricia (7pm to 7am)

This is the least-cost option that augments overnight hours when Bylaw Services are not operational. This option provides two security guards in a vehicle for 12-hour shifts, 7 days per week. The roving patrols would operate within the vicinity of the encampment, to include Upper Patricia, the encampment boundaries, and the industrial areas East of Queensway. These patrols would act as an early warning for 911 response, in an "observe and report" capacity.

High-level cost estimates are approximately \$400,000 per year, and do not include ancillary expenses.³

Option 2: 24-hour coverage within the vicinity of Lower Patricia

This option extends Option 1 from 12-hour/day to 24-hour coverage. High-level cost estimates are approximately \$800,000 per year. Additional ancillary costs for a permanent vehicle and dedicated staff trailer are not included. Both Option 1 and Option 2 are based upon fewer than 100 occupants. Should the number increase to over 100, additional security personnel are required. In this scenario, costs exceeding \$1M per year are quickly realized.

Option 3: Status quo – no dedicated security presence

Because of the passive observe and report nature of private security, the return on investment may be marginal. The benefit of private security specific to encampments is largely optics, with the potential for an early warning to 911 through observation. On the other hand, two security personnel have limited means to observe a large geographic area, and encampment occupants have the capability to determine security personnel patterns: schedules, routes, etc. Therefore, it is rather easy for inventive occupants that wish to engage in criminal behaviors unbeknownst to security personnel.

Recommendation: Administration recommends piloting Option 1 for 2023, and off-set these costs through the Safer Communities Grant. A reassessment of private security ought to occur in the latter parts of 2023, for reconsideration in 2024 onward. The downside to a pilot project is higher upfront costs and a potential disincentive for private security firms to submit a bid as it is a temporary project.

³ These cost estimates may change following an RFP process.

Security Cameras (CCTV):

The City of Kelowna utilizes City-operated CCTV in their designated encampments. This is an option, however due to FIPPA legislative requirements, it would be a substantial undertaking with significant costs and would take a considerable amount of time to implement. This initiative would require a comprehensive Privacy Impact Assessment to be completed, with involvement of the provincial Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, and a likely RFP process to manage the system. Costs and timelines are currently unknown. Should Council wish to explore this further, Administration can engage a consultant to provide options for Council to consider at a later date.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

The cost estimates are approximate and may not be reflective of actual costs, given the City's procurement process and the fluid nature of this complex file. It is important to note that cost estimates are based upon the encampment not expanding beyond the size observed in previous summers (i.e., fewer than 100 occupants). Should the situation change, costs will likely escalate. Administration continues to pursue a limited, passive approach to ensure un-forecasted costs associated with responding to encampments remain manageable within existing budgets. Ancillary costs to support the new Provincial action plan have not been included and are currently unknown.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

This report provides enhanced security options within the vicinity of Lower Patricia. Administration is seeking Council direction on procuring enhanced security services. Administration recommends postponing Council's consideration of adoption of the Parks & Open Spaces Bylaw Amendments until any approved security services are acquired and ready for implementation.

These security enhancements include, provision of private security, re-allocation of RCMP overtime patrols (already budgeted for), and access/egress for emergency vehicles via barriers. Due to ongoing maintenance costs, enhanced fencing is currently not recommended.

This forms the first phase of a larger strategy that shall be presented at a future council meeting. Significant discussions with other agencies shall occur prior to the strategy being finalized for council's consideration. This plan supports the Province of British Columbia in upholding their responsibility to provide suitable housing and supports to the unhoused population. The City continues to be a supportive partner. As of this report's publication, the Province unveiled a major new strategy, "Homes for People" action plan, with the intent to provide "more homes to support people experiencing homelessness and new actions to close encampments." Administration recommends endorsing this plan by offering to the Province, Prince George as a pilot community to implement the new multi-agency response teams and initiatives as soon as practical.

More info on the Province's action plan: https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/Homes_For_People.pdf

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Adam Davey, Director of Public Safety

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: [2023/04/12]

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