

DATE: June 19, 2024

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

SUBJECT: Post Community Safety Town Hall Update

ATTACHMENT(S): “What we Heard” Document

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. THAT Council RECEIVE FOR INFORMATION the report dated June 19, 2024 from the Director of Administrative Services, titled “Post Community Safety Town Hall Update”.
2. THAT Council ENDORSES the broad phasing proposed within the report dated June 19, 2024 from the Director of Administrative Services, titled “Post Community Safety Town Hall Update”, as a tool to communicate and organize activities related to the Lower Patricia Boulevard Encampment.
3. THAT Council APPROVES the boundaries of the Lower Patricia Boulevard Encampment proposed within the report dated June 19, 2024 from the Director of Administrative Services, titled “Post Community Safety Town Hall Update”, as the City’s interpretation of the Court protected area.
4. THAT Council DIRECTS Staff to re-establish perimeter fencing at the Lower Patricia Boulevard Encampment to better define the boundaries of the encampment as described within the report dated June 19, 2024 from the Director of Administrative Services, titled “Post Community Safety Town Hall Update”.
5. THAT Council DIRECTS Staff to explore redirecting existing staff resources to support the reinvigoration of the Community Safety Hub as a forum to promote coordination amongst partner agencies and to share quarterly updates on the management of social issues as described within the report dated June 19, 2024 from the Director of Administrative Services titled, “Post Community Safety Town Hall Update”.
6. THAT Council DIRECTS Staff to set meetings where local government partners, namely the Regional District of Fraser Fort George and the Lheidli T’enneh First Nation, can provide input on the actions described within this report.

PURPOSE:

This report provides Council with recommendations based on conversations held at the May 28, 2024 Town Hall on Public Safety. Background information on the status of work related to this topic and further actions that may be considered are included for consideration.

BACKGROUND:

Topics discussed at the Town Hall largely centered on conditions in the downtown core, and specific attention on encampment related issues was noted. Concerns seemed to center on housing, air quality (smoke & fires) and transition plans for the court protected encampment. Comments common to other areas of the City, and comments specific to other neighborhoods, were also raised. The breadth of these comments are being used to help inform how future engagement is proposed to take place. Additional reports that overlap with conversations held during, and after, the town hall are also underway. These include a review of the overnight joint patrols pilot project and ongoing work around the city's advocacy priorities which will be brought back to Council at a later date.

Comments on the LPBE and the City's ongoing management of the site.

Administration recommends that the City approach the ongoing management of the Lower Patricia Boulevard Encampment (LPBE) in four broad phases as follows:

Phase One: Build Capacity.

This is the current phase. In phase one, the City and partners work to build capacity in the community to help provide suitable day time facilities and low barrier housing for those community members in need of these services. Concurrently the City and partners work to manage health and safety issues at the LPBE and across downtown. These activities attempt to balance the diverse needs of the community while helping to establish the conditions outlined as necessary by the British Columbia Supreme Court (BCSC) for the transition of the LPBE site from a fulltime, entrenched encampment to other forms of sheltering.

Key milestones targeted throughout this phase include the continuation of offers of suitable shelter via BC Housing for the Victoria Street Supportive Housing Facility (formerly the North Star Hotel). A further target is joint work between the Province and the City to complete construction of the Transitional Shelter Facility at 397 3rd Avenue, and staff and tenant that space.

Phase Two: Demonstrate Capacity and Alternatives.

In phase two having built capacity in the community. The City demonstrates to the BCSC that conditions are appropriate for the transition of the LPBE site to other forms of housing, including the possibility of temporary overnight sheltering being permitted in designated areas, new housing options such as the Transitional Shelter Facility, and the Victoria Street Supportive Housing Facility to name a few examples. Note, these new developments are anticipated to help relieve pressure on existing shelter spaces which can be used by those who do not accept other tenancing offers. This is an important consideration due to the realities of sheltering in northern climates.

It is possible that phase two could be entered as early as Q4 of 2024. Key milestones targeted in phase two include revisiting the legal status of the LPBE. As the LPBE is currently protected by an Order of the BCSC, the City's external legal counsel informs us that it will be necessary for the City to return to court and obtain a further order to decamp the site. Again, this would be done with the intent of transitioning the site from an entrenched encampment while helping (via partners and the designation of open spaces) to provide options for other forms of sheltering. The services of external legal counsel have been retained to help guide this process on behalf of the City.

The goal of this phase is the lifting of the order that has contributed to the LPBE site becoming entrenched with unregulated structures. This phase also helps to verify independently that suitable daytime facilities and low barrier housing are present within the community.

Phase Three: Transition to other forms of Housing.

If successful in phase two, the City will work with partners to transition the LPBE to other forms of sheltering, supported by the facilities mentioned above, and using one or more designated outdoor sheltering locations. The site would undergo remediation and be secured to prevent future occupation in areas not expressly designated for the purpose of temporary overnight sheltering. For clarity, the current LPBE space will be included in the review of parks and open spaces where sheltering may be permitted. Further, this transition is not intended to take place until the court order has been obtained and efforts have been exhausted to offer housing to occupants.

It is possible that phase three could be entered as early as Q1 of 2025. Key milestones targeted throughout that time frame may include remediation of the LPBE site. Transition over the winter is being considered as historically it is the time of year where the lowest rate of occupancy is experienced within the encampment and as it is anticipated all individuals will have received one or more offers of shelter by this time.

It is our intent to encourage partners to have all individuals interested in receiving shelter tenanted by this time. Those who do not accept these offers are anticipated to have adequate options (warming shelters / daytime facilities / shelter beds / transitional shelter facility) separate from the entrenched encampment to utilize.

Municipally, the City will continue to support extreme weather responses via the City's emergency programs division, which distributes Ministry of Emergency Management & Climate Readiness (EMCR) funding to ensure service providers can operate with extended hours as warming or cooling centres and provide food, water, and other supplies when activation conditions are met.

Phase Four: Maintain Capacity and Prevent Entrenchment.

In phase four the City works with partners to address new needs and is proactive in preventing any campsites from becoming entrenched. The City continues to work with partners to forecast needs and build capacity to address changes in the community. Phase four will begin when phase three is concluded.

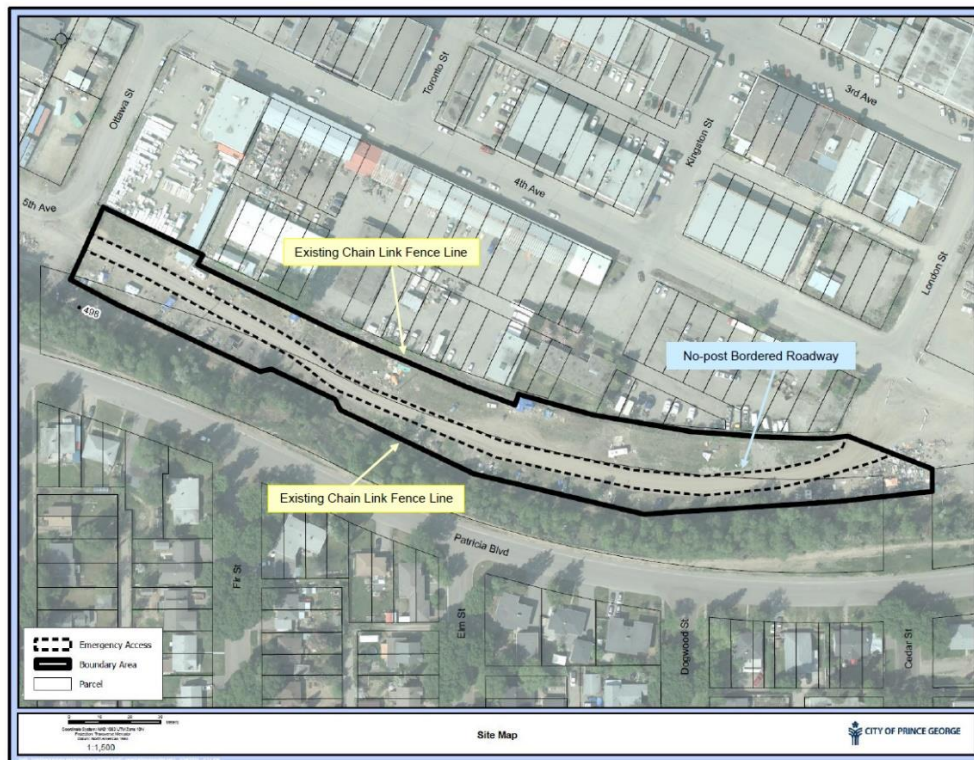
Specific Actions and Sequencing

With broad phasing established it is more tenable to examine specific actions and where they may best be contemplated in relation to the overall plan.

Action #1: Encampment Boundary Delineation

As part of phase one it is recommended that the boundaries of the encampment are made clear and then physically marked with fencing and appropriate signage to ensure clarity. Currently, the legal boundaries of the LPBE are not well defined, as the *Prince George (City) v. Stewart* court decision refers only to “a green space at the end of 5th Avenue”.

The City (supported by external legal counsel) believes that the intention of the Court was to identify the location of the encampment as it then existed in October 2021. Individual encampments have extended further east than were present at that time. As such, to bring clarity to the boundaries of the encampment for the benefit of all involved, the boundaries below are recommended to be used as the City’s interpretation of the LPBE boundaries going forward.



These boundaries are roughly based on the area occupied by the encampment at the time of the October 2021 Order of the BCSC in the *Stewart* case.

Staff believe that the boundaries shown are generous when compared to the photographic evidence submitted in 2021. This is a deliberate choice as defining the boundaries is not intended as an immediate attempt to decamp individuals. Rather, those outside of the boundary, but near the LPBE site will be engaged in conversation with the goal of having them relocate into the boundary. Staff will work to time this outreach to include notice and seek alignment with BCH offers of housing. No forceful decampment of those outside of the

boundary, at the time of this report, is intended to take place. This approach would be reevaluated at the start of phase three if all attempts up until that point have failed.

Staff recommend that perimeter fencing be reestablished and improved on the east, west and south edges of the encampment approximately in line with the boundaries shown above. Adequate signage would also be installed. Signage is intended to include how individuals are expected to camp within the site and to reinforce existing bylaws.

Action #2: Reinvigorating the Community Safety Hub

As many comments on the need for greater coordination have been received, staff recommend reinvigorating the Community Safety Hub as a forum to host these conversations. If Council is supportive of redirecting resources to help promote coordination, staff will review options to build support around this function on a part time basis using existing staff resources.

Action #3: Increased Cleanup Efforts.

Throughout phase one, two and three, until the time the LPBE is closed as a permanent encampment, increased cleanup efforts (especially following structure fires) are recommended to continue. Should this site remain designated for overnight camping in the future a plan specific to keeping the site maintained is intended to be developed.

The value in removing debris from the LPBE site is recognized as multifaceted, supporting both those within and external to the encampment in meeting their needs. Three sites have been cleaned since the start of June and a plan has been created to address all remaining burnt sites internal to the encampment. Staff have worked to gain and document consent to undertake this activity to ensure that these works are completed in a respectful manner and given the existing Order. It is staff's intent to continue removing structures when they become destroyed or abandoned. Below is one example of recent site remediation at the LPBE on the eastern edge. Where a site is remediated and it is outside of the designated boundaries, work to deny that space as a future camp site will be explored.



Action #4: Explore the use of an overnight sheltering model considering both decentralized and centralized locations.

During phase one and two a review of the approved spaces to shelter is planned to be undertaken by staff to support the transition away from an entrenched encampment. Currently, one location is designated for temporary overnight sheltering within the City of Prince George. This space coincides with the court protected LPBE and is designated through the City's Parks and Open Spaces Bylaw. As the intent is to transition away from an entrenched encampment Council has an opportunity to re-evaluate where temporary overnight sheltering may be permitted within the City.

Sheltering in one or more designated parks and open spaces could be considered as a tool to help those unhoused in the community meet their immediate needs while other forms of housing are established. These designated sites would not be intended to become entrenched encampments.

Under a temporary overnight sheltering model, as example, individuals could be permitted to erect shelters from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. Under this model, no daytime shelters are permitted. Sheltering would also not be permitted in environmentally or culturally sensitive areas, playgrounds, sports fields, community gardens and horticultural areas, footpaths/roads, cemeteries or medians/boulevards.

For safety and bylaw compliance, shelters could be restricted to being no larger than nine square meters (approximately 10 ft x 10 ft), spaced four meters (13 ft) apart, and four meters (13 ft) from any listed no-sheltering areas or private property lines.

As well it could be outlined that no camping would be permitted directly under trees and branches. Shelters would not be allowed to be attached to trees, plants, benches, lamp posts or other structures and no one would be permitted to remove tree branches or use City property to construct shelters. Further, no one would be permitted to have fire or open flame appliances or combustibles, except for approved BBQs in allowable areas and at least two meters from any structure or no-shelter areas.

Staff will begin to evaluate suitable sites for Council consideration as sheltering areas. In doing so, locations would be evaluated based on proximity to services and suitability as a sheltering location. Tools such as a map, which could be used by those seeking an appropriate space would be developed as part of this process with the intent that this resource could be shared with partner agencies.

Action #5: Timelines and goals for the TSF.

The opening of the Transitional Shelter Facility is intended to mark the transition of phase one to phase two. The City through Hearst and Hearst, and via other forums, will continue to advocate for housing solutions that meet the needs of individuals. To help ensure that the needs of those unhoused are being met, feedback is being provided to BC Housing whenever it is shared with staff.

One concern that has been shared is about pets. For clarity, administration does not view pets within the encampment as a barrier to closing LPBE as an entrenched site and would recommend moving forward with decampment notwithstanding their presence on site. We

are providing this comment now to ensure that individuals and agencies understand the need to address this aspect in their own planning. As a municipal response the City will continue to advocate for agencies to address how animals are to be accommodated.

An important part of creating the shelter network assessed as needed to support those unhoused in the community is the 3rd Avenue Transitional Shelter Facility. At this time, it is anticipated that the Transitional Shelter Facility will be constructed in the fall of 2024. While the City has received considerable feedback asking that the site be established sooner it is important to note that the site needs to not only be constructed but also staffed through BC Housing and prepared to receive tenants. As such, the fall of 2024 appears to be a realistic timeframe. Staff encourage and trust that BC Housing will do all it can to bring this service online as quickly as possible and remain in weekly communication on this file.

It is the City's intent to approach the BCSC as soon as practicable following the establishment of the Transitional Shelter Facility to demonstrate that alternate options to an entrenched encampment exist. Approaching the Court will be challenging to undertake prior to Q4 of 2024 as it is recommended that the City be confident that appropriate shelter and day time facilities are present before this application takes place which relies on these facilities being ready to occupy.

Action #6: Regular updates and dedicated webpage.

Throughout phases one, two and three the City could commit to quarterly updates. Comments received show a clear desire for more information to be shared on this file. A webpage with quarterly updates could be established to communicate developments on the LPBE and downtown files. The intent is for this to be a space where the community could view resources, see FAQ's and receive information on developments around these files. Options to provide comments and feedback to the City would also be highlighted. Quarterly updates would be proposed to continue until the LPBE has been transitioned, at which time updates would continue on an as needed basis.

Other comments:

Support for further resident led clean up:

Feedback received shows a clear interest from the community in helping to improve conditions in their city. In addition to those actions already outlined, staff will make connections with LPBE residents and interested parties to discuss a second community clean-up at the encampment. This work builds on the successful cleanup that occurred in April where 50,000 lbs. of items were collaboratively removed from the site to promote better conditions for all involved.

The management of smoke and burning:

The City's Fire Chief is an independent statutory decision-maker with powers under the City's bylaws and the *Fire Services Act* to make orders to address public safety. The LPBE has been the location of many fires, including a recent spate of larger and more significant fires. As such, options to address concerns where individuals have amassed large camp sites are being explored.

Separate from these specific instances, smoke and fires on the site remain a concern. The City will continue to respond and enforce against inappropriate burning.

However, due to the nature of this issue, concerns related to smoke are assessed as being most definitively managed by transitioning the site away from an entrenched encampment as soon as practicable. This will eliminate the inappropriate fireplaces that we understand are crafted from time-to-time internal to structures which are a common source of complaint.

Future Engagement Plans

While many comments received at the town hall centered on the downtown core, it is recognized that each part of the City has diverse needs and experiences. To better understand the needs in areas outside of the downtown area staff will work to include public safety as an element in other engagement activities that take place around town. As example, having protective services staff attend to gather feedback and answer questions when the City is routinely engaging on other topics.

As well, on June 21st the City, Regional District of Fraser Fort George and Lheidli T'enneh First Nation plan to recommit to a Memorandum of Understanding which outlines how the three governments will continue to strengthen communication and coordination. Under this framework the City could raise the content of this report for discussion with local government partners to seek input on how the municipality advances these items in an effort to increase regional collaboration and understanding.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

The content of this report can be viewed in relation to the strategic priorities of:

1. City Government and infrastructure Priorities, specifically focusing on meaningful communication and relationship development to advance shared priorities; and
2. Social Health and Well-Being Priorities, specifically ensuring a safe, healthy, and clean community for all by documenting, communicating, and implementing the city's homelessness and public safety strategies to support advocacy efforts and enhance service delivery.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

Of the recommendations presented in this report two are known to have direct financial implications at this time. The reestablishment of perimeter fencing at the LPBE to better define the boundaries of the encampment can be anticipated to have a significant cost and is work that would likely be completed using external resources. If directed to undertake this work staff will seek quotes, and pending responses this item may come back to Council or be undertaken using existing budgets as appropriate.

Second, exploring staffing options that would support the reinvigoration of the Community Safety Hub can be expected to have a cost. If directed to explore this work staff will review current vacancies, grant funds and other options to bring about this result in an efficient manner with a view to using existing budgets to accommodate this work to the extent possible.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

This report is intended to respond to comments received at the Public Safety Town Hall held in May of 2024. As much of the conversation centered on topics related to the downtown core, this report provides language that may be adopted to communicate the planned activities to manage and

transition the LPBE away from an entrenched space. Several specific actions mentioned at the town hall are presented for consideration.

In recognition that comments and questions related to other parts of the city were also raised, actions to increase collaboration and information sharing are also presented for consideration.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

APPROVED:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting Date: June 24, 2024