



MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF COUNCIL

December 2, 2019
 6:00 pm
 Council Chambers of City Hall
 1100 Patricia Boulevard Prince George, BC

PRESENT:

Mayor Lyn Hall, Chair
 Councillor Everitt
 Councillor Frizzell
 Councillor Krause
 Councillor McConnachie
 Councillor Ramsay
 Councillor Sampson
 Councillor Scott
 Councillor Skakun

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. Kathleen Soltis, City Manager
 Mr. Walter Babicz, General Manager of Administrative Services
 Mr. Shane DeMeyer, Northern Health
 Mr. Fred Crittenden, Manager of Bylaw Services
 Ms. Gina Layte Liston, Director of Public Works
 Mr. Adam Davey, Associate Director of Community Services
 Superintendent Shaun Wright, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)
 Ms. Leslie Kellett, Legislative Coordinator

A. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Moved By Councillor Skakun
Seconded By Councillor Sampson

That the agenda for the regular Council meeting scheduled for December 2, 2019 be amended to add the PowerPoint presentation at item B.1 and that the agenda, BE ADOPTED AS AMENDED.

Carried Unanimously

B. MAYOR'S REPORT

B.1 Mayor

Moved By Councillor Everitt

Seconded By Councillor Krause

That Council RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION public feedback on issues and opportunities to further inform the City's response to the social issues throughout Prince George with a focus on downtown.

Carried Unanimously

Ms. Kathleen Soltis, City Manager, provided a PowerPoint presentation regarding the impact of downtown social issues and contributions to resolve the issues by the City of Prince George, Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Northern Health. Further information was provided on social issues in communities, the City's 2019 response effort amounting to \$1.7+ million dollars, corporate impacts, and the proposed First Avenue Service Hub partnership between the City of Prince George, Northern Health and BC Housing.

Superintendent Shaun Wright, RCMP, spoke to the impact of the community social issues on police support services including use of the Downtown Safety Unit, patrol resources, mental health calls, and the increase in population due to the "Hub City" of Prince George.

Mr. Shane DeMeyer, Northern Health, spoke to the contributions and impacts of the community social issues on health services and further noted current activities undertaken by Northern Health including: simplifying services; keeping people stable and in their homes; providing in-home intensive mental health and substance use support; supporting harm reduction, overdose prevention and wellness; optimizing access to detox beds; increased access to Opioid therapy; primary care – enhanced teams; child and youth support; mental health inpatient care; and First Nations mental wellness.

Mr. Bernie Schneider attended Centre Table, spoke on behalf of a group of downtown business owners wanting to express that the "Downtown Is Open for Business," further noted the need for downtown business owners and staff to feel safe in their place of employment and requested consideration be given to the City forming a committee to work together to resolve the existing issues.

Mr. Jesse Cody attended Centre Table, noted concerns with downtown safety for his employees, open dealing of drugs, the lack of short-term housing available for the homeless, commented that collaboration on the social issues should have come sooner and inquired on the number of RCMP calls to individual business addresses.

Superintendent Wright responded advising that some businesses are hot spots for calls for service.

Mr. Lance Boyds attended Centre Table, noted that there are similar issues outside of the downtown in the Spruceland area and inquired on what the RCMP plans to do to mitigate issues in this area.

Superintendent Wright acknowledged the Spruceland area is on the RCMP's radar.

Mr. Daniel Gallant, employed downtown, attended Centre Table, commended Council for hearing the public on these social issues and the swift response following the public discussions that have taken place. He further spoke to possibilities regarding police support services, noted that the province announced a decrease in policing budget and proposed the City consider charging a levy to downtown businesses to offset the salary costs for one to one and a half police officers with a concentrated presence in the downtown area.

Ms. Gail Inkster attended Centre Table, acknowledged appreciation for the compassion for social issues from members of public and proposed that a regular meeting be set to provide a forum to deal with these types of issues.

Mr. Jason Luke attended Centre Table, noted ongoing requests from business owners to have existing parking issues downtown addressed, concerns that the existing parking bylaw does not encourage customers to attend downtown due to the high risk of receiving a parking infraction ticket and proposed the City enter into discussions with downtown organizations such as Downtown Prince George and Prince George Chamber of Commerce to address downtown parking issues.

Major Neil Wilkinson, Salvation Army, attended Centre Table, shared a story of showing compassion for individuals in difficult circumstances as an opportunity to make connection and provide opportunity for change in an individual's circumstances.

Ms. Dawn Matte attended Centre Table, proposed the City not only partner with the big organizations, but consider including local businesses in their discussions and decision making. She noted fear for her safety and that of her employees in the downtown area, advised that this has resulted in an increase of business costs to cover additional security and benefits for her employees to access mental health services and remarked that the social issues extend beyond downtown and that accountability of partners is critical.

Ms. Kerry Pateman, Coordinator, Community Partners Addressing Homelessness (CPAH) attended Centre Table, advised that the visibility of the homeless and look of downtown is largely there because of a lack of other land uses, noted that businesses have left and continue to leave the downtown area and encouraged Council to make a commitment to a collaborative approach with all partners and in particular individuals who are on the street, to determine their needs.

Ms. Katherine Tuck attended Centre Table, suggested partnerships be considered with organizations responsible for bringing students and international students to the community for post-secondary education, and LGBTQ2S community groups and further noted that the issue at hand is more broad than provision of housing.

Ms. Nansi Long attended Centre Table, highlighted that this a community wide issue, suggested that consideration be given to solutions implemented in other communities, expressed concerns that the public washrooms are not located in centralized areas and noted that rather than "big housing projects", there is a need to create neighbourhoods where people feel wanted, needed, respected and inclusive of our community. It was further suggested that that a collaborative approach with the target population will be more successful than proposing a solution without their consideration.

Ms. Jacqueline Marion attended Centre Table, advised that her business is located in the downtown area and noted that the physical presence of police support services would make a big difference to the safe feel of the downtown.

Ms. Charlene Thorp attended Centre Table, spoke to the drastic change in the community over the past five years and noted concerns that bus shelters have become spaces for unacceptable behavior such as drug use and open defecation.

Ms. Connie Abe, Executive Director, Association Advocating for Women and Community (AWAC) attended Centre Table, shared information on the Association's programs and opportunities available to the homeless, advised that there are services available, but there are a large number of individuals who choose not to access the available services including housing.

Mr. Chris Trump attended Centre Table, commented that it is not a solution to place drug addicts and hard-to-house individuals in one housing complex; as it does not address the underlying issues and proposed accommodating individuals in alternative housing such as RV Parks.

Ms. Torie Beram attended Centre Table, noted that she is employed downtown and highlighted the importance of the individuals being discussed being recognized as people and that proper consultation with stakeholders, business owners, people in the community and the vulnerable population located downtown is necessary.

Ms. Jordan Tucker attended Centre Table, commented that 24-hour injection sites and assisted housing does work, that this is not an issue to be fixed by Council, highlighted the community's responsibility to assist in resolving these ongoing issues and shared information about a winter clothing drive - "Warm Winter Woolies for People Without Homes."

Ms. Barbara Bud attended Centre Table, expressed fear for her and her children's safety, commented on the importance of addressing an individual's underlying issues to truly affect change to our community's existing social issues, the immediate need for emergency shelter and proposed that the City contact communities such as Lethbridge and Medicine Hat to inquire how they eliminated homelessness.

Ms. April Ottesen attended Centre Table, stated that communities are viewed by the way their most vulnerable populations are treated, suggested that if the solution does not address the mental health and addictions issues that includes appropriate consultations with all stakeholders, the problems will get bigger and referenced the eradication of homelessness in Medicine Hat as a benchmark for success and cost savings.

Mr. Karmjeet Manhas attended Centre Table, inquired what percentage of people are hard-to-house because of mental health versus addictions versus homelessness, noted the deteriorated state of downtown, concern for children who attend his place of business daily and are exposed to needles and debris on the ground, suggested a reallocation of City funds to fund solutions and commented that there is an immediate need to establish a place for the homeless to go during the day and for shelter.

Mr. DeMeyer, Northern Health, advised that while he does not have the exact numbers, almost all people with substance use issues also have mental health issues.

Ms. Danielea Castell attended Centre Table, spoke in support of the compassion being exhibited in the community, the need for an immediate development of shelter for the population who are currently living on the street, proposed that the application of a restorative model be applied to the vulnerable population to have them buy into their own self-care, the value of the formation of a committee or coalition group that includes representatives from all of the organizations who have been involved and are yet to be involved, including representatives from our marginalized population, shared concerns with the current downtown parking bylaw being a preventative to increased traffic in the downtown area and noted an example of a successful transitional housing project in Portland, Oregon - dignityvillage.org.

Mr. Peter Wise, attended Centre Table, noted that despite available housing, some individuals are not interested in being housed and proposed the City pass a bylaw that disallows homelessness and vagrancy and that would permit the RCMP to pick up individuals and remove them from the street thereby providing the opportunity for mental health professionals to assess the individuals' situation and to connect to services, medication, and housing.

Mr. Daniel Roy attended Centre Table and expressed that many individuals who are living on the street having coping challenges due to trauma, stigma around addiction, commented that a viable solution to recovery from drugs and alcohol is necessary to help the vulnerable population and proposed the creation of a local recovery centre for men and women.

Mr. Bill Tooke attended Centre Table, commented on the unresolved trauma of many individuals in the vulnerable population, compassion and understanding needed when meeting and speaking with individuals, mental health and psychological problem associated to drug use and noted that that statistics be reviewed on the actual crime data related to the downtown.

Dr. Connie Delisle attended Centre Table, spoke to her own experiences, suggested implementing a digital wall to engage youth and noted that resolutions start with the removal of barriers for all populations – youth, seniors, mentally ill, etc.

Ms. Kyla Turner attended Centre Table, spoke to the existing adult withdrawal centre, noting that in order to help individuals withdraw from substances, more than one week withdrawal management program will be necessary, addressed other harm reduction programs such as safe drug supply, commented on the lack of community connection with individuals who are struggling and the need to provide a safe place for individuals when they need them and noted the operating hours of the Fire Pit Cultural Drop In Centre.

Mr. Paul Svisdahl attended Centre Table, spoke to the downtown parking bylaw and noted satisfaction with the parking system as a citizen, homeowner and building owner downtown. It was further noted that some tenants have businesses that service vehicles for customers which requires parking on the street and proposed a solution to provide an opportunity to charge an extra fee to business owners to reserve parking stalls for a short period of time.

Ms. Shelby Wenyenmayr, Community Health Educator, Positive Living North, attended Centre Table, spoke about harm reduction, noted that the issue of substance use and the vulnerable population is a situation that needs to be addressed by all levels of government and commented on the success of harm reduction in saving lives.

Mr. Dino Beganovic attended Centre Table, spoke about judging individuals and their behavior, noted business owners are not equipped to deal with the people on the street needing help and proposed charging a rental rate for the on-street parking and that money be used to financially support the downtown social agencies.

Ms. Carmel Bennett attended Centre Table, noted a need to gather information from homeless individuals to ascertain their desire to be housed versus sheltered, suggested that the issue of homelessness is complex and the importance of being heard and proposed that urban planning could be incorporated with the creation of spaces where people can connect meaningfully as a way to address the barriers of the marginalized individuals.

Mr. Christos Vardacustas, Aboriginal Housing Society, attended Centre Table, spoke to the demographics of Prince George noting that there are individuals aging out of care in group homes and students leaving school homeless and further noted the importance of inclusiveness not segregating the population.

Councillor McConnachie exited Council Chambers at 9:18 p.m. and returned at 9:20 p.m.

Councillor Skakun exited Council Chambers at 9:21 p.m. and returned at 9:23 p.m.

Ms. Melodie Ward attended Centre Table, noted that a fundamental issue involved is prejudice against mental illness, highlighted the need for appropriate supports and inclusivity of the marginalized population and commented on the importance of understanding an individual's situation and needs.

A woman (name unknown) attended Centre Table, commented on the money required for solutions put forward, highlighted the importance of downtown businesses as assets to the community, their taxation revenue and number of people they employ, encouraged Council to continue supporting local business and noted an informative YouTube video by Joe Minicozzi, Urban Planner.

A man (name unknown) attended Centre Table, spoke to the need for accountability and statistical evidence for policies and programs put in place toward the resolution of the social issues, suggested that the homeless are homeless due to choices made, and noted his opposition to financially penalizing the business owners downtown to resolve the social issues.

Ms. Kyla Turner attended Centre Table, spoke for a second time regarding the need to encourage the RCMP Members to interact with individuals on the street outside of their car to reduce the physical barrier which may be perceived as intimidating.

Moved By Councillor Sampson

Seconded By Councillor McConnachie

That Council EXTENDS the December 2, 2019 regular Council meeting to 11:00 p.m.

Carried Unanimously

Discussion commenced regarding appreciation for the all the public input received, challenges faced by the business community, consequences for criminal activities, the need for safety and security for businesses and patrons' downtown, the importance of involving community partners and stakeholders and the City's contributions to addressing social issues downtown and in other areas of the community.

Moved By Councillor Skakun
Seconded By Councillor McConnachie

That Council DIRECTS Administration to prepare Terms of Reference for a select committee addressing downtown social issues.

Carried Unanimously

C. ADJOURNMENT

THE REGULAR MEETING OF COUNCIL ADJOURNED AT 10:27 P.M.

Moved By Councillor Sampson
Seconded By Councillor Scott

That there being no further business the Regular Meeting of Council, BE ADJOURNED.

Carried Unanimously

CHAIRPERSON

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