

Date: March 11, 2025

To: **Standing Committee on Public Safety**

Name and title: Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

Subject: Options to Increase Overnight Patrols

Attachment(s): N/A

Recommendation(s):

That the Standing Committee on Public Safety RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report titled “Options to Increase Overnight Patrols” from the Director of Administrative Services, dated March 11, 2025.

Purpose:

The Standing Committee on Public Safety through the committee work plan has requested information on how safety, and the perception of safety, may be increased downtown through the increase of patrols / staff presence.

Background:

Through the previous committee conversation four potential options, in addition to infrastructure upgrades like lights and cameras have been mentioned. These include additional engagement with contracted security, the establishment of an overnight bylaw shift, further enhancements to RCMP staffing levels, and repeating the targeted patrols completed in the spring of 2024.

Private Security:

Staff have made inquiries to determine what support may be available from 3rd parties to support overnight patrols in the downtown core. Generally, this form of private security, during the hours of 11 PM to 7 AM, is forecasted to have a rough annual cost of \$400,000. This model would likely consist of two security guards and a vehicle who would do patrols through the area and observe and report on issues witnessed.

This form of security would likely be best handled as a Local Area Service. Municipalities have the authority to provide services such as water and sewer or business improvement to specific areas within the community. These local area services are paid for in whole or in part by local property owners in that area through local service taxes.

Local area services may be initiated either by owners of property in the proposed local area, or by the municipal council.

Each local area service must be established by bylaw to authorize imposing a type of property tax for the service within the local area. For example, a municipality may choose to establish a local area service bylaw to provide many forms of service including downtown revitalization projects that would be paid for in part by the property owners within the local service area.

The committee may choose to recommend to Council that the municipality work with the Downtown Prince George Business Improvement Association to canvass its membership for interest in establishing a local area service to hire overnight security in as an option to move this approach forward.

The committee may also recommend what value, if any, the municipality should contribute to such a program. Legal advice will likely be required to ensure any financial support recommended is in line with the municipalities Community Charter (Chapter 26 Part 3) restrictions from providing assistance to business.

Overnight Bylaw Services

Currently, there are 8 Bylaw Officers dedicated to downtown Prince George who work in teams of two, on four different shift patterns, and who provide coverage from 7 AM to 11 PM, seven days per week. Establishing a night shift may be an option if the committee is interested in having additional staff present in the downtown area overnight. These staff could also support other calls for service during these hours (noise, burning complaints, parkade checks).

The rough annual cost for four Bylaw 1 Officers including equipment and training is \$395,672.

The committee could consider having staff explore this option further to identify the best practices from across comparable municipalities and to look at implementation considerations before returning a follow-up report to the committee.

Expediate Planned RCMP Enhancements

The committee may recommend to Council increasing the proposed speed of reaching the targeted number of RCMP Officers suggested in the Police Services Resource Review. The report suggests that 19 additional officers should be hired. Administration has spread the request for these positions over 5 years with 4 members being asked for in each of the years 2023 through to 2026 with a further 3 members in 2027.

For example, the committee could recommend going above the likely staffing enhancement request of 4 in the next budget cycle and instead suggest Council approve 5, 6, or 7. Additional comment that these positions should be focused on addressing downtown concerns could be communicated to the RCMP.

The annual cost for 1 RCMP Officer is roughly \$234,833.

Repeat Overnight Fire Patrols

In 2024, burning complaints and item fires in the downtown drew attention from the community. Collaborative patrols between Prince George Fire Rescue, Prince George Bylaw Services and the RCMP were launched to reduce the number of fires in the downtown and associated property damage. This initiative saw proactive patrols, both on foot and with vehicles, to locate and document fires that were occurring, identify individuals responsible for dangerous fires downtown, to educate and where possible enforce, against these instances.

Patrols were conducted by 1 Bylaw Officer, 1 RCMP Member and 1 Firefighter between 10 PM and 6 AM three times per week for 4-6 weeks (12 to 18 patrols). Staff availability was at times challenged and not every patrol had the full set of staff in attendance. Further, enforcement against those burning refuse for warmth and security has generally been an unsuccessful tactic.

Increased patrols during these hours would increase the number of staff on shifts (Fire Services) or the amount of overtime (Bylaw) and thus have a cost. As an example, within Fire Rescue, the 12 to 18 patrols proposed were expected to cost between \$20,000 and \$27,500 to bring in the additional staff necessary. Work units have not budgeted for these expenses and would be concerned incurring these costs at this point in the year without a budget enhancement.

The committee may consider recommending to Council repeating the overnight patrol initiative and allocating \$30,000 toward this project to cover labour costs. Alternatively, the Committee may consider recommending this become an annual occurrence each spring starting in 2026 and have staff build this into future budgets.

58 fires were located during the 2024 patrols, some of which were unattended. All were easy to extinguish but left damage on the surfaces where they were burning.

Strategic Priorities:

Improving safety, and the perception of safety, can be viewed as supporting the strategic plan pillar of Social Health and Well-Being.

Summary and conclusion:

This report provides four options for consideration and proposes some plausible next steps for each should the committee wish to invest time and resources into their study or make recommendations to Council.

Respectfully submitted:

Eric Depenau, Director of Administrative Services

Approved:

Walter Babicz, City Manager

Meeting date: 2025/03/18