Date:	April 7, 2025
To:	**Standing Committee on Public Safety**
Name and title:	Eric Depenau, Director, Administrative Services
Subject:	Promotion of Block Watch and Citizens on Patrol Programs
Attachment(s):	Citizens on Patrol Policy Manual.

Recommendation(s):

That the Standing Committee on Public Safety RECIEVES FOR INFORMATION the report titled, "Promotion of Block Watch and Citizens on Patrol Programs" from the Director of Administrative Services, dated 7 April 2025.

Purpose:
To advance a work plan item directed by the committee which had staff discuss with local RCMP opportunities to promote Community Policing's Block Watch and Citizens on Patrol programs.

Background:

Prince George RCMP Citizens on Patrol (COP) Program: The Prince George RCMP Citizens on Patrol program was implemented to enable concerned and dedicated volunteers to be of assistance to the Prince George RCMP Detachment. The objective is to promote patrolling of the Detachment areas with trained volunteers. The volunteers, under Community Policing's leadership, patrol and observe and report any suspected criminal activity. This is accomplished by the patrol acting as an observational support team for the RCMP. The Prince George RCMP Citizens on Patrol have great potential for being of assistance in deterring crime within the community (Citizens on Patrol Policy Manual, 2014, p.3).

Note, the Prince George RCMP Citizens on Patrol Program is not intended to replace regular Police or private licensed security patrol services but allow the RCMP to direct their focus to other areas of concern to reduce criminal activity.

The program operates under the direction and guidance of the Prince George RCMP Community Policing Section. Applicants must fulfill the following requirements:

- Be 19 years of age, and be of good character
- Applicants must reside in Prince George
- Satisfy interview board of a genuine commitment to the deterrence of unlawful activity in the community
- Must pass an RCMP security clearance screening
- Applicants must be prepared to appear in court as a witness if required
- Applicants must be able to provide a clean driver's abstract

(Citizens on Patrol Policy Manual, 2014, p.3)

Program Limitations:

A non-exhaustive list of considerations include:

- Patrollers do not patrol alone.
- Patrollers are not trained to use self defence or compliance tools.
- While patrolling, patrollers do not stop, pursue, or otherwise engage with vehicles that are identified as potentially involved in criminal activity.
- Patrollers do not conduct any form of investigation (such as searching areas on foot).
- Patrollers do no handle or disturb anything at a crime scene.

(Citizens on Patrol Policy Manual, 2014, p.3)

As mentioned above, Prince George Citizens on Patrol Volunteers are not to replace or be mistaken as security. They are professional eyewitnesses, that have a link to the RCMP in the event of an incident.

Currently, the Prince George Community Policing Unit has one RCMP Patrol Lead Volunteer and twelve Patrol Volunteers. The program has helped with patrolling at Downtown Business Improvement Association events over the last nine years (e.g. Summer, Fall and Winter Fest and Plaid Friday). The Patrol Volunteers have also patrolled on and off-street parking and left notices indicating what items were in clear view that may attract theft. The Patrol Volunteers also provide Speed Watch, an ICBC sponsored educational program aimed at reducing incidents of speeding. Further, the Prince George COP Volunteers have been deployed in the downtown area to patrol and deter criminality. They have also successfully dissuaded individuals from starting fires and encouraged individuals to extinguish active fires.

There is potential for the Prince George Citizens on Patrol Program to assist other entities with local events.

Block Watch Program

Background

As a proactive approach to reducing crime throughout neighbourhoods, Seattle community policing developed a model using education in conjunction with community support. This led to the development of the 'block watch' concept. In British Columbia, the Block Watch Society of BC officially governs neighbourhood watch activities under the Block Watch program.

The Block Watch program seeks to provide communication, advocacy, resilience and education by streamlining communication between neighbours, providing a platform for neighbourhood advocacy; and, by providing resources and awareness which leverage resilience throughout communities.

In Prince George, the RCMP began to partner with the Block Watch Society of BC in the late 1980's/ early 90's. Over the duration, Prince George has hosted up to 88 local crime watch areas (e.g. Douglas Street, Chief Lake Area, Upper Mud River etc.). Currently, Prince George has 44 active block watch neighbourhoods, that are divided into two veins: rural and urban. There are 19 crime watch areas within Prince George's rural areas and 25 within the City's urban areas.

Benefits of the Program

Block watch involves being alert to your neighbourhood to keep yourself and others aware of suspicious activity, current crime prevention techniques and local crime trends.

- the program brings police and communities together in their common goal of community safety,
- block Watch promotes increased feelings of neighbourhood security and helps build a stronger sense of community,
- a block watch can be set up in residential areas, apartments, condominiums, townhouse complexes, mobile home sites as well as rural communities,
- Block Watch also provides general security and theft prevention tips for homes and vehicles. Such as:

  - Lighting – Visibility is seen as a deterrent for criminal activity, installing a LED or motion sensor light in dark corners can assist as a deterrent. The program also encourages smart lights that turn on with a timer.
  - Visibility – Good surveillance includes having clear sight lines from inside your house to the curb or edge of your property.
  - Locks – Keeping doors and windows locked is a good practice with deadbolt locks recommended.

Limitations to Consider

- Block Watch is meant for residential neighbourhoods.

- When a Block Watch or Neighbourhood Watch is formed, participants do not patrol the neighbourhood or engage potential offenders.

- Someone in the neighbourhood needs to take on the role of captain and act as a point of contact, organize meetings, identify Block Watch Sign locations, organizing referrals of new residents to join the neighbourhood group, organize specific incident notifications, and liaise with insurance company inquiries about the Block Watch discounts.

- Being a leader of a Block Watch, neighbours may bring various neighbourhood issues which fall outside of the captains' responsibilities such as "can you install a traffic light" or "my neighbour's trees are encroaching on my property, can you speak with them" These are not the responsibilities for the captain. It is not a block watch responsibility to deal with neighbourhood conflicts.

Opportunities for Promotion:

Citizens on Patrol

Website: The City may consider hosting on the City website a dedicated Community Policing webpage that highlights the unit's prevention programs and services, including the Citizens on Patrol Program. This is work Police Support Services and Communications would organize internally and would be added to their respective workplans. The immediate investment would likely be limited to time.

Awareness Campaign: The City Communications team could assist with promoting the service that Citizens on Patrol provide (e.g. video promoting foot patrol at events, speed watch at school zones, etc.). The immediate investment would likely be limited to time, although funds could be dedicated to enhancing this effort (advertising, etc.).

Booths and Events: The City currently promotes the program through print promotional materials and event attendance, such as booths at Canada Day and National Indigenous Peoples Day. In the future further emphasis could be put on this type of engagement. There may be financial implications (staffing, registration, higher consumption of materials, investment in display items, etc.).

Investment in Materials: The City could have banners or posters produced that indicate "this event is being patrolled by the Prince George Volunteers on Patrol" or similar as an advertising/awareness tool. Brochures and other print could be revamped to support promotion of the program. It is likely that the design work for these materials could be completed by the communications team pending timelines for production. The cost of printing the materials would vary depending on the quantity produced.

Information Sharing: Staff can place renewed emphasis on engaging with groups like the Chamber of Commerce and the Downtown Business Improvement Association to determine if they are interested in sharing information about the Prince George Citizens on Patrol Program with their memberships. This is a routine liaison activity and will be actioned by staff following today's meeting.

Recruitment: Staff routinely attend the University of Northern British Columbia job fair; staff could prepare to attend additional local job fairs and work with the RCMP on a job fair campaign to promote the program and related opportunities.

Synergy with Block Watch: It is assessed that there is further opportunity for the COP program to share information with Block Watches on neighborhood specific suspicious activity observed by the COP patrols. Staff will explore this topic with leaders from the two groups.

Block Watch

Website: The City could consider hosting a Community Policing webpage, as mentioned above, that highlights the unit's prevention programs and services, including information on Block Watch, neighbourhood Safety Audits and CPTED assessments. The Block Watch page could host tools and information on how to start and maintain a Block Watch.

Brochures: Brochures could be revamped to support information sharing and the establishment of new watches. It is likely that the design work for these materials could be completed by the communications team pending timelines for production. The cost of printing the materials would vary depending on the quantity produced.

Printouts for Homeowners: Staff could explore the possibility of including information alongside existing mailouts. It is likely that the design work for these materials could be completed by the communications team pending timelines for production. The cost of printing the materials would vary depending on the quantity produced.

The Super Citizen electronic newsletter is an alternate option which reduces printing costs and consumption of supplies. The email list has over 500 current subscribers currently.

Block Party: Historically Block Parties have been arranged where an RCMP/ Community Policing representative, a conservation officer, a fire department representative, bylaws and other applicable agencies have met and shared information. The meetings were designed to disseminate information and awareness over a few hours, and to address any questions or concerns of neighbourhood residents.

Staff from across Administrative Services (Police Support Services, Fire and Bylaw) have connected to discuss collaboration on a series of area specific Block Watch meetings whereby RCMP, Bylaws, the Fire Department and other applicable agencies can meet, share information and contacts while the established Block Watches hold their annual Block Parties. It may be possible to leverage these events to generate new images and materials to promote the program.

CCTV Initiative: We could encourage residents to sign up for the City's CCTV initiative in the event an incident happens on their block.

Lead Volunteer: There is interest from staff in exploring a lead volunteer position that could provide monthly updates, safety suggestions and possibly support quality control functions for the various Block Watches. This position could help draw attention to, and interpret, open-source information such as the analytics available on the PG RCMP Criminal Analyst Statistics site.
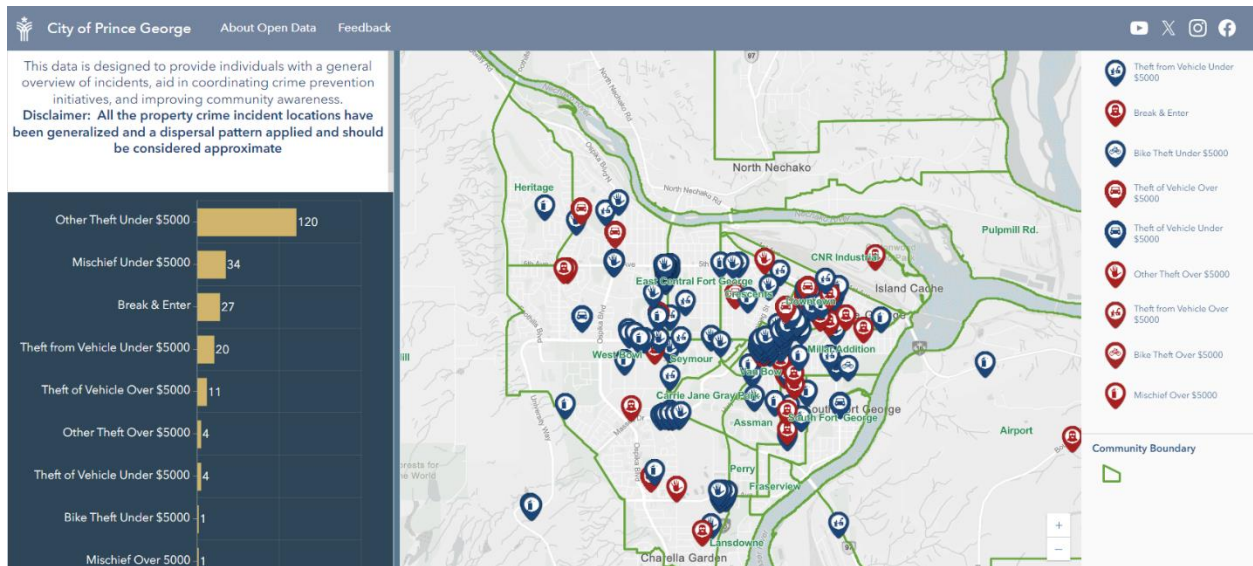

IMAGE 2.1 – City of Prince George – Property Crime Map
(* Informed by the PG RCMP Criminal Analyst Statistics)

Strategic Priorities:
The committee's exploration of possible enhancements and support to the Citizens on Patrol and Block Watch programs may be viewed in alignment with the strategic pillar of social health and wellbeing.

Summary and conclusion:
This report is provided for consideration in response to a work plan item established by the committee.

Respectfully submitted:

Eric Depenua, Director, Administrative Services
Prepared by Krystal Devauld, Assistant Manager, Police Support Services

Approved:

Walter Babicz, City Manager
Meeting date: 2025/04/15

Document Number: 759719