

DATE: January 6, 2021

TO: MAYOR AND COUNCIL

NAME AND TITLE: Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

SUBJECT: Downtown and Area Service Enhancement Package

ATTACHMENT(S): None

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Council:

1. RECEIVES FOR INFORMATION the report dated January 6, 2021, from the Acting City Manager, titled “Downtown and Area Service Enhancement Package”; and
2. APPROVES the reallocation of the \$400,000 annual budget from Civic Facilities for security service costs to Bylaw Services, to enable the hiring of four Bylaw Enforcement Officers, with a view to improving the management of social issues in the downtown and surrounding area.

PURPOSE:

The 2020-2024 operational financial plan approved by Council includes a \$1,422,795 service enhancement package to better manage the downtown and area social issues. The service enhancement package consists of six interrelated areas including Police, Bylaw Services, contracted security, social inclusion services, parkade cleanliness and safety, as well as homeless camp and bio-hazard materials clean up.

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a brief assessment of the service enhancements implemented in 2020, and to seek approval to shift budget allocations within the total service enhancement package to reflect ongoing evaluation as well as feedback from the Select Committee on a Safe, Clean and Inclusive Community. With Council approval, associated service changes will be made in early 2021.

BACKGROUND:

The multi-department service enhancement package approved by Council at its February 24, 2020 meeting was intended to augment safety, cleanliness and social inclusiveness in the downtown area. The \$1,422,795 service enhancement package was allocated as outlined in the following table:

APPROVED SERVICE ENHANCEMENT PACKAGE

Function	Description	Total
Police	7 two-member patrols at 6 hours each per week (9 months)	\$ 273,249
Facilities	Establish existing security costs in budget of \$350K and enhance by \$50K	\$ 400,000
	Security Gate Updates for Parkades	\$ 200,000
	Miscellaneous hardware costs (locks, fobs, access, etc.)	\$ 50,000
Bylaw	Upgrade two Bylaw Compliance Assistants to Bylaw Enforcement Officers and add two more Bylaw Enforcement Officers	\$ 189,051
Social Inclusion	Downtown Homeless Storage/Service Hubs (contribution to staffing)	\$ 236,000
Civic Operations	Marginalized Camp and Illegal Dump Cleanup, Downtown Bio-hazard Removal, and Equipment	\$ 274,495 (operating) \$216,000 (equipment)
TOTAL		\$1,888,795
	Security Gate Updates paid for by Off-Street Levy	(\$200,000)
	Marginalized Camp & Illegal Dump Cleanup Equipment paid for by MFA Lease	(\$216,000)
TOTAL	Service Enhancements – Downtown Safety & Cleanliness	\$1,422,795

Feedback received from members of the Select Committee on a Safe, Clean and Inclusive Community prompted an evaluation of these enhancements, and an associated opportunity to reprioritize the allocation of resources, to reflect learning and emerging priorities.

Service Assessment:

Policing:

Superintendent Shaun Wright – OIC of the Prince George Detachment of the RCMP provided the following overview:

The current funding allocation of \$273,249 for enhanced patrols in the downtown core/Gateway areas is an optimal format for providing police presence in those areas. In the current format, there is a two-member patrol for six hours per day. The Downtown Safety Unit (DSU) currently works nine-hour shifts, typically providing coverage Tuesday-Friday and Tuesday-Saturday on alternating weeks. This is a combination of day and afternoon shifts, depending on the service demands and operational objectives. The enhanced patrols are scheduled to provide some surge capacity overlap with the DSU during the high traffic late afternoon hours of the day and to extend dedicated police presence in the area up to six hours beyond the nine-hour DSU shift. The enhanced patrols also provide a dedicated police presence on the days that the DSU is not on shift. The shifting of the enhanced patrols is based upon considerations of public safety, efficient police response and a visible police presence. It is not simply high priced security.

Civic Facilities – Security and Bylaw Services:

Since 2017, security costs for civic facilities (Four Seasons Leisure Pool, Conference & Civic Centre, Rolling Mix Concrete Arena, City Hall, the plazas and parkades) have increased substantially. An assessment of these costs, together with feedback from the Select Committee on a Safe, Clean & Inclusive Community, has prompted Administration to determine that security goals would be better met if the above referenced \$400,000 service enhancement was transferred to Bylaw Services. This requested reallocation would allow the expansion of Bylaw Services. Combined with the 2019 Bylaw Services enhancement that increased bylaw presence from five to seven days per week, this reallocation would establish Bylaw Services Enforcement Officer coverage from approximately 7 am to 11 pm, 7 days per week.

When integrated with RCMP services, this reallocation of resources would enable a ‘triangle of presence’ in the larger downtown area. Four Bylaw Enforcement Officers will be permanently deployed to work from the Downtown Community Safety Office at 2nd Avenue and George Street (scheduled to open by spring 2021) with the remaining Bylaw Services staff housed at City Hall. Combined with the RCMP Detachment on Victoria Street, uniformed staff at three locations within the downtown core will be available to provide enhanced public safety services.

The new downtown Bylaw Services model will feature a ‘boots on the ground’ approach with officers walking pre-determined downtown routes. Bylaw Services, operating from the Downtown Community Safety Office and City Hall, will also manage services previously provided by private security, including the monitoring of civic facilities and parkades. This revised service model will allow Bylaw Services to continue to work closely with the downtown business community and other partner agencies, to implement complementary and targeted initiatives. The hiring of four new Bylaw Enforcement officers will be scheduled to occur concurrently with the Community Safety Office preparing to open. Full operating capacity is scheduled to occur by May 1.

Downtown Homeless Storage/Service Sites:

The Prince George Native Friendship Centre (PGNFC) continues to operate a site at 181 Quebec Street offering storage, washroom and outreach services. The Association Advocating for Women and Community (AWAC) expanded its shelter services at 144 George Street to provide access to storage, washroom, shower, laundry and outreach services for both men and women. The City partners with BC Housing and the Aboriginal Housing Management Association to fully fund these operations.

During the first year of operation, both sites reported high utilization rates. On many occasions, all available storage bins were utilized. Detailed statistical reports are provided to the City every six months, and include identification of the barriers faced by clients in relation to housing access. The biggest barrier recorded at both locations is substance (particularly opioid) use.

Despite the presence of these well-utilized service sites and the availability of outreach workers located at the sites to respond to service requests of business owners, behaviours often precipitated by mental health and substance use disorders continue to be of concern in the downtown and area. Therefore, Administration will be further evaluating the impact of the service enhancement allocation focused on social inclusion.

Civic Operations – Marginalized Camp and Bio-Hazard Cleanup:

As of November 4, 2020, Civic Operations had responded to 139 service requests to cleanup marginalized camps throughout the city. From Monday through Friday service requests are investigated by the Foreperson immediately following a complaint. Camp cleanup is then coordinated with Bylaw Services, the City's Health & Safety Division and when necessary, the RCMP. Marginalized camp cleanups are not generally done on the weekend, as lead-time is required to ensure a proper field hazard assessment is completed before crews attend the site.

Bio-Hazard cleanup was also complaint/service request driven in 2020. Requests for service initiated by downtown and area business owners as well as Bylaw Officers working in the downtown, were immediately responded to Monday through Friday. Cleanup followed within hours and was normally completed the same day. On the weekend, response times were slower due to the limited number of staff on shift. An analysis of the calls for service revealed that most are placed in the morning prior to the opening of businesses, and tend to be associated with specific areas of the downtown and the Gateway.

Feedback, in relation to budget enhancements to augment cleanliness, provided by the Select Committee on a Safe, Clean and Inclusive community has identified an opportunity to plan a more proactive approach to bio-hazard cleanup. Administration will be working with Downtown Prince George and the Gateway BIA to explore their interest in receiving City funding intended to pay a contractor to conduct bio-hazard inspections and cleanups in targeted areas from Monday – Saturday prior to 9 am.

Administration will also continue to share with its partners, stakeholders, and residents, descriptions and schedules of downtown and area cleaning services. At present, these include:

- Litter patrols every morning Monday – Friday, year round. In the summer months, litter patrols occur 7 days a week. Summer months also includes mechanical litter collection on sidewalks in the downtown;
- Clean up and disposal of localized small debris and overnight shelters, during inspections or as reported;
- Winter sand pick up and sidewalk flushing at the conclusion of winter. Moving forward, Civic Operations will plan a monthly, pre-scheduled sidewalk flush for areas of historic need;
- Street sweeping of downtown streets, twice per week on night shift during the summer months;
- Collaboration with the Downtown Clean Team to facilitate the provision of tools and equipment and;
- Bio-hazard cleanup on sidewalks.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Council has identified the enhancement of safety and security throughout Prince George with an emphasis on downtown, as a focus area.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION:

The 2020-2024 operational financial plan approved by Council includes a \$1,422,795 service enhancement package to better manage the downtown and area social issues. Throughout 2020, a number of multi-department service enhancements were implemented including those focused on policing, security, bylaw services, social inclusion, and civic operations. Feedback received from members of the Select Committee on a Safe, Clean and Inclusive Community prompted an evaluation of these enhancements, and an associated opportunity to reprioritize the allocation of resources to reflect learning and emerging priorities. An assessment of service enhancements provided in summary form in this report highlights opportunities to shift allocations to better achieve goals, to continually evaluate enhancements to ensure they are meeting expectations, and to respond proactively, particularly in relation to bio-hazard clean-up.

Council is asked to receive the report for information and to approve the reallocation of \$400,000 from Civic Facilities (Security Costs) to Bylaw Services to enable improved management of social issues in the downtown and surrounding area.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Walter Babicz, Acting City Manager

PREPARED BY: Chris Bone, Senior Manager of Strategic Initiatives and Partnerships

Meeting Date: 2021/01/11