



City Council News March 13, 2019

Making Quesnel safer

Quesnel is a very safe place in which to live. This bears repeating: Quesnel is a safe community to live in, to raise a family in, and to grow old in.

However, over the past two years the incidences of property crime, particularly thefts from vehicles, have increased dramatically and Quesnel's calls for service from the RCMP are among the highest in the province on a per officer basis.

Despite social media claims to the contrary, however, Quesnel has not gone "downhill" from some bygone time when we experienced little or no crime, nor is our community struggling with anything that's different from any other community our size or larger. As a result of systemic poverty, increasing homelessness, the opioid crisis and other mental health and substance abuse related issues, property crime, panhandling, squatting, and public consumption of drugs is on the rise everywhere.

Over two years ago, Quesnel City Council created a new Standing Committee, our Public Safety and Policing Committee (PSP), to examine these issues, explore best practices, and present Council with options to address them. Our PSP Committee has worked with stakeholders and retained the assistance of an expert in policing and bylaw to help us develop a comprehensive strategy to deal with the emergent public safety issues that can make our community feel less safe than it actually is.

One of the key principles underlying our approach to making Quesnel safer is that we must avoid merely displacing issues from one part of town to another and we must make every effort to develop partnerships to address the root causes of the public safety issues we're trying to resolve. Displacing the problem or neglecting the root causes of the problems will not result in any lasting remedies.

To this end, Council has played an active role in our Community Caring for People with Addictions (CCPA) roundtable initiative designed to improve the suite of services our community provides to people with mental health and addictions issues. This initiative is now in the implementation stages and has a coordinator and peer worker support to ensure the strategy actually addresses the street issues we're seeing.

Council, in partnership with the Cariboo Regional District, is also embarking on a new housing initiative that will create an updated housing needs assessment for the entire North Cariboo and a strategy for everything from shelter and social housing to market housing. Staff will also be bringing proposed bylaws to Council to assist us to more quickly deal with problem properties, including drug houses, and improve the overall quality and safety of rental properties in our community.

Our growing partnerships with First Nations, the School District, and Northern Health will also help us to address some of the systemic issues in a preventative way that will hopefully, over time, break the cycle of abuse and poverty which creates the circumstances that can lead to the property crime and street-related public safety issues we need to address (i.e. squatting, panhandling, petty property crime, etc.).

While we work on these longer-term strategies, however, Council is very aware that we need to take steps now to address the rise in property crime we're experiencing while attempting to resolve some of the emerging public safety issues in our community. Along with adding more police and bylaw resources in the 2019 budget, Council has also received and committed to a consultant's report that will see us deploy these resources effectively and initiate a new program, "Safer Quesnel," designed to immediately address our current public safety concerns.

Everyone has a role to play in making Quesnel even safer, please stay tuned as we embark on this new initiative and be prepared to play your part.

Read the Safer Quesnel Report here: <http://bit.ly/2SUK9SQ>

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