



THE CORPORATION OF THE CITY OF COURTENAY

BRIEFING NOTE

To: Council

File No.: 4000-00

From: Director of Corporate Services

Date: August 30, 2023

Subject: Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy Project – Engagement Summary and Analysis

PURPOSE: To provide Council with a summary and analysis of contributor feedback regarding the City's bylaw compliance policy and strategy.

BACKGROUND:

Responsibility for the City's Bylaw Services Division was moved from Legislative Services Department to the then Corporate Support Services Department (now Corporate Services Department) in 2020. At the time of the transition, the bylaw services division was comprised of one regular full-time bylaw enforcement officer and a part time contracted animal control officer. Over the past two and a half years, the division, in response to evolving and emerging service needs has grown to include three regular full-time bylaw enforcement officers, a part time contracted animal control officer, and a regular full-time bylaw enforcement manager.

The current Bylaw Enforcement Policy (#4000.00.01) (Attachment A) was adopted by Council at the August 8, 2017 Council meeting. The intent of the Policy was to ensure a consistent, fair and transparent approach to bylaw enforcement. At the time, the policy was developed based on the *Bylaw Enforcement Best Practice Guide for Local Governments* (The Office of the Ombudsperson, 2016), and did not include community feedback on policy priorities, consider division capacity and service levels, or include a strategy for achieving the policy objectives. As the community and its bylaw service needs have evolved rapidly over the past six years, a more comprehensive and fulsome review of the Bylaw Compliance Policy is needed to ensure the City is able to meet current and future service expectations.

The Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy Project (the Strategy) was identified by Council as a strategic priority for 2023. The purpose of the Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy Project is to develop a comprehensive, forward-thinking bylaw compliance strategy and service delivery model that not only addresses the present needs of the community but is adaptable to meet future demands. The Strategy aims to foster public trust and ensure outstanding service delivery. The development process is thorough and inclusive, involving a review of the existing bylaw compliance model, gathering insights from key contributors, and actively prioritizing community input to ensure a model that is representative of all parties' needs. The project deliverables include:

- Bylaw Compliance Policy
- Bylaw Compliance Strategy
- Good Neighbour Guide

Curiositas Consulting has been engaged by the City to lead the Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy Project.

DISCUSSION:

Project work over the past two months has focused on reviewing the current bylaw services enforcement policy, processes, and procedures. In addition to the internal reviews, the project has also focused on internal and external engagement activities including: interviews, an online survey, and pop up in person engagement events.

Current State: Policy, Processes, and Procedures

Upon review of the current bylaw services enforcement policy, processes, and procedures it is clear that the Bylaw Services Division is undertaking a variety of activities to increase its efficiency, consistency and fairness. Key developments include strengthening performance metrics, implementing standard operating procedures (SOPs), and implementing a shared electronic filing system for better file and data management. Staff health and safety protocols have been prioritized. Staff training focuses on areas like de-escalation, situational awareness, mental health and additions training, and cultural informed practice. The current state analysis determined that planned and funded future technological advancements, such as the Tempest database, will further streamline processes and increase investigative and reporting capabilities.

A review of the Bylaw Services workforce finds that the City has made significant progress in enhancing its bylaw services, growing the workforce to meet demands. Transitioning to web-based automation for calls will improve efficiency and free up resources, addressing the administration gap. With a team comprising 3 full-time officers, one contract officer (working two days a week), a shared clerical resource (equivalent to 0.20 full-time equivalent), and 1 full-time manager, the city is better equipped to handle increased service demands. This proactive approach aligns with limited resources, ensuring a more responsive and effective bylaw enforcement system.

Based internal and external input gathered through contributor surveys and interviews, and in reviewing the existing 2017 Bylaw Enforcement Policy the following are updated/amendment to the Bylaw Policy are recommended:

- Develop a new Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy that:
 - Better balances public safety, environmental protection, and community engagement and awareness raising activities,
 - emphasizes proactive inspections based on validated priorities,
 - enhance handling of complaints,
 - offer alternative dispute resolution options, and,
 - establish clear timeframes for compliance, including defined escalation process for unresolved complaints.

Leveraging technology, the proposed policy will aim to enhance efficiency and communication.

Contributor Interviews:

In-depth interviews were conducted with both internal and external contributors. These interviews, encompassing a myriad of perspectives, were instrumental in understanding the existing bylaw services framework, its strengths, limitations, and potential areas of improvement. Internal contributors included those directly involved in bylaw services, members of the City's senior leadership team, and managers from city departments including Development Services, Public Works Services, Corporate Services, Recreation, Culture and Community Services, and the Engineering Department.

Externally, key contributors included Island Health, the Comox Valley Coalition to End Homelessness, the Downtown Courtenay Business Improvement Association, RCMP, the Community Justice Center, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, and BC Forestry. The cross-sectional dialogue with these entities provided a wide perspective on community principles, needs, opportunities and challenges.

The information gathered resulted in the identification of themes that will significantly inform the bylaw compliance strategy update. Each theme offers critical insights into various facets of bylaw compliance, such

as social challenges, the necessity for inter-departmental collaboration, trust-building with the community, process efficiency, and optimizing the use of current resources.

Collaboration and Partnerships: This theme emphasizes the recognition that a collective effort is necessary to tackle complex problems, and collaboration with key contributors will be further encouraged. Proactively working with community partners, such as outreach services and the RCMP, is crucial to effectively address social issues.

Balancing Enforcement and Trust Building: Building trust and positive relationships within the community while maintaining order through enforcement actions is vital – find a balance between these approaches, emphasizing consistent policies and procedures that outline expectations, guidelines, and consequences.

Homelessness and Encampments: This theme highlights the significance of social challenges and the need for effective strategies to mitigate them. Integrating a client-focused model into the resource allocation strategy will better balance bylaw response and resource allocations to address both social challenges and other priority issues.

Siloed Departments: Disconnect between City departments poses a significant barrier to effective bylaw compliance. Addressing barriers to effective communication, collaboration, and coordination between different departments is essential to ensure the provision of a high level of service.

Process Streamlining: Standardizing processes across the organization will improve efficiency, reduce duplication of efforts, and enhance overall effectiveness. The use of technology and consistent digital solutions will be encouraged to streamline workflows and improve productivity.

Leveraging Existing Resources: Optimizing current processes, systems, and personnel is a priority, given the organization's size. Identify and utilize the strengths and capabilities already present within the organization to achieve efficient outcomes and address challenges effectively.

Bylaw Policy Survey:

A community survey was conducted to understand the public's perceptions and understanding of bylaw enforcement in the City of Courtenay. Between June 21 and July 25th, four-hundred and fifty-one (451) individuals completed the bylaw policy survey (350 online and 101 paper format). Using a five-point Likert scale, the survey asked participants to rate their level of agreement with various statements related to bylaw enforcement services and their impact on the community. The survey was offered online and in person at three pop up engagement events.

Survey results highlight a strong community consensus about the importance of bylaw enforcement, with 75% of respondents acknowledging its crucial role in maintaining community safety, aesthetics, and accountability. However, they also pinpoint areas for improvement, with 65% of respondents advocating for more transparency in enforcement processes and 70% seeking expedited response times for addressing reported violations.

Interestingly, there is a marked shift in community sentiments towards education and awareness, with 85% of respondents emphasizing the importance of citizen education on bylaw enforcement over punitive measures. However, regarding alternative dispute resolution methods like mediation or restorative justice

processes, the responses were diverse, suggesting a need for further exploration and public education on this matter.

The survey results showed a community inclination towards online complaint submission options, with nearly 80% of respondents indicating their preference for online bylaw service requests. This feedback provides the City an opportunity to streamline its digital processes and improve the user experience for these services.

NEXT STEPS

Through our public engagement process, it is clear there is a significant gap in public knowledge regarding the City's bylaw services and the roles of community members regarding compliance and complaint processes. With the current state analysis, survey insights, and contributor feedback in mind, the development of the "Good Neighbor Guide," will serve as a comprehensive educational tool designed to inform the community about bylaws, the associated processes, and the ethos of peaceful coexistence within the community. The guide is a significant outcome of this project and aims to foster responsible behavior, contributing to a thriving Courtenay community and will include the following:

Tailored to Your Needs: The "Good Neighbor Guide" will be designed to be inclusive and user-centric. It will provide relevant and essential information tailored to different groups, including developers, business owners, residents, and individuals experiencing homelessness. By tailoring the guide to specific user groups, we seek to ensure that everyone has access to the information most relevant to their circumstances.

Empowering Responsible Behavior: Central to the guide's purpose is empowering each member of the community with knowledge about our city's bylaws and their direct impact on our community's livability. By providing insights into responsible behavior, the guide will encourage community members to make informed choices that contribute to a safer and more harmonious living environment.

Building a Thriving Community: Collective efforts to understand and adhere to the bylaws will create a positive and vibrant Courtenay. The "Good Neighbor Guide" serves as a catalyst for fostering positive interactions and promoting a collaborative spirit among neighbors. Through shared understanding and cooperation, we envision a stronger, more cohesive community where everyone plays a part in enhancing the overall quality of life.

As the "Good Neighbor Guide" is finalized it will be presented as an integral part of the broader bylaw compliance strategy to Council in the coming months. This guide holds great potential to address the identified gap in public awareness and empower our community members with the knowledge they need to thrive in Courtenay. Engagement and review findings, the proposed bylaw compliance strategy, comprehensive bylaw compliance policy, and the Good Neighbor Guide will be presented to the City Council in October. This initiative is aimed at solidifying the bond between the community and Bylaw Services, ensuring the continued safety, well-being, and peace of our citizens.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The costs to update the Bylaw Policy, develop the Compliance Strategy and the Good Neighbour Guide are funded in the 2023 operating budget.

ADMINISTRATIVE IMPLICATIONS:

The Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy Project is part of the 2023 Corporate Services Department workplan.

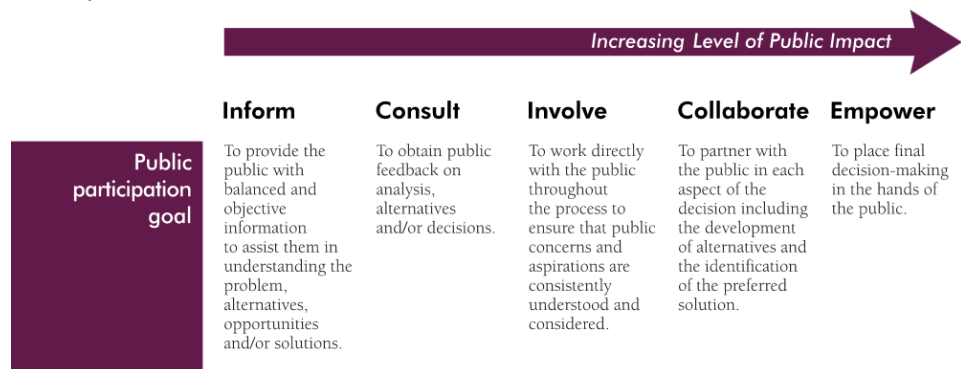
STRATEGIC PRIORITIES REFERENCE:

This initiative addresses the following strategic priorities:

- Streets and Transportation - Review City's approach to parking standards downtown: Bylaw Enforcement Policy review and update

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Staff would inform, consult, involve, and collaborate with the public based on the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation:



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RECOMMENDATION: THAT Council receive the “Bylaw Compliance Policy and Strategy Project – Engagement Summary and Analysis” briefing note.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. City of Courtenay Bylaw Policy 2017

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