

# UB-1

## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

### **UB1. Safe and Inclusive Streets: Support for Community Crisis Management Through Understanding and De-escalation**

On November 6, 2019, Council referred this item to the Council meeting on November 26, 2019, as Unfinished Business.

Submitted by: Councillor Fry

WHEREAS

1. Jane Jacobs famously posited: "The public peace—the sidewalk and street peace—of cities is not kept primarily by the police, necessary as police are. It is kept primarily by an intricate, almost unconscious, network of voluntary controls and standards among the people themselves, and enforced by the people themselves";<sup>1</sup>
2. Today, the complex relationship of gentrification and inclusion; poverty; homelessness; mental health and addiction have emerged as a crisis all along the West Coast and specifically Downtown Vancouver. This crisis often manifests in conflict: Concerns around crime and safety, neighbourhood decline, and chronic street nuisance. These conflicts in turn result in higher volumes of police and non-emergency calls, calls for more security and pro-active engagement, and compassion fatigue;
3. Chronic street nuisance is a particular and highly visible symptom of the larger crisis and can been defined as conditions that (1) violate community norms governing proper conduct in a particular public space (2) over a protracted period of time (3) to the minor annoyance of passersby. A person perpetrates a chronic street nuisance by persistently acting in a public space in a manner that violates prevailing community standards of behavior, to the significant cumulative annoyance of persons of ordinary sensibility who use the same spaces;<sup>2</sup>
4. In 2019, Vancouver's homelessness count was 2,223 people (up two per cent from 2018), with 614 people living on the street;<sup>3</sup>
5. Street entrenched and homeless people have often experienced trauma including intergenerational and childhood trauma; sexual and physical victimization; physical or mental health issues and addictions; compounded by the trauma of living on the street or in substandard housing and of social isolation;<sup>4</sup>
6. First responders, non-profits, outreach workers, as well as shelter and housing providers are all variously trained in some form of de-escalation techniques through non-violent crisis intervention instruction and trauma-informed workshops;

7. Increasingly the private sector, including BIAs and security providers<sup>5, 6</sup> are learning de-escalation techniques through non-violent crisis intervention instruction and trauma-informed workshops, and offering instruction to their members. For example: Toronto's Downtown Yonge BIA<sup>9</sup> holds information sessions (facilitated by the Canadian Mental Health Association) for business owners and managers who want to learn more about techniques for de-escalation when individuals enter their establishments in distress;
8. Many businesses and residents of Downtown Vancouver find themselves ill-equipped for any sort of community crisis management or de-escalation, and amidst increasing reports of conflict surrounding chronic street nuisance and disorder, many Vancouverites don't know who to call, how to help or get help;
9. In 2014, Vancouver City Council adopted the Caring for All Report<sup>8</sup> with the following call to action: "The City clearly has a responsibility to support and advocate for safe and inclusive communities for all residents... By making use of its full range of social development tools, from advocacy to direct services, the City is well positioned to support partnerships to help transform existing services and approaches in the arena of mental health and addictions. As experienced over the last year in the work of the Task Force, the City can also play an important convening role to bring partners and citizens together to address complex issues";
10. In 2014, Vancouver City Council adopted A Healthy City For All strategy<sup>9</sup> with a clear vision statement and within one of its three main areas of focus Healthy Communities - Cultivating Connections, a clear call to action to *Examine regulations, policies, and processes that affect our relationships with and between residents - past, present and future.*

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**

- A. THAT Vancouver City Council commit to safe and inclusive streets and communities for enjoyment and use of all residents.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to reach out to relevant partner agencies including Vancouver Coast Health, Vancouver Police Department, Canadian Mental Health Association, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, and others (including community groups, peer supporters and BIAs) as applicable to develop a workplan by Q2 2020 for a collaborative strategy around community engagement for responding to and managing street disorder.
- C. THAT a strategy of community engagement for responding to and managing street disorder:
  - i. is inclusive and accessible, rooted in compassion and mutual understanding;
  - ii. is informed by best practices and lived experience;

- iii. is rooted in non-violent crisis intervention and de-escalation;
- iv. provides participants a better understanding of issues around mental health and trauma;
- v. considers place-making opportunities to counter impressions and incidence of chronic street nuisance; and
- vi. reduces call volumes for police response, while redirecting more appropriate resources as applicable.

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1. Jane Jacobs The Death and Life of Great American Cities
2. [Yale Law: Ellickson, Robert C., "Controlling Chronic Misconduct in City Spaces: Of Panhandlers, Skid Rows, and Public-Space Zoning" \(1996\)](#)
3. [2019 City of Vancouver Homelessness Count](#)
4. [Homeless Hub: Trauma Informed Services](#)
5. [Vancouver office building managers' response to homeless people has shifted](#)
6. [HxBIA provides free workshops on deescalation techniques, opioid response training](#)
7. [Downtown Yonge BIA - For Businesses: Mental Health Recognition and Response Workshop](#)
8. [Caring for All report on priority actions to address mental health and addictions](#)
9. [City of Vancouver: A Healthy City for All](#)