

Community Response to Downtown Safety and Well-being

ISSUE

Information in this report reflects what is needed for a whole-community approach to safety and well-being and further identifies the development of a plan specifically related to the Saskatoon Tribal Council (STC) Emergency Wellness Centre (Wellness Centre), neighbouring area and the Central Business District.

BACKGROUND

City Council, at its Regular Business Meeting held on April 25, 2022, considered a report from the Administration on the Saskatoon Tribal Council Wellness Centre Extension Request for 145 – 1st Ave North.

It was resolved in part that:

“That Administration report back on a comprehensive plan to provide greater safety and security for all people – relatives, staff, customers, residents in the immediate area around the Wellness Centre and the vicinity, developed in partnership between City Police, Fire, The Saskatoon Tribal Council, adjacent businesses and the Downtown Business Improvement District, and area residents.”

CURRENT STATUS

At that same Regular Business Meeting, a request for an extension of the existing lease for 145 – 1st Avenue North with Saskatoon Tribal Council for the purpose of providing a Temporary Emergency Residential Shelter, was granted up to June 15, 2022.

The Safety/Maintenance Committee (the committee) met with customer-facing and strategic partners to discuss the next steps, share information related to work completed with temporary shelters and service providers, and to hear more about the work that STC has done in relation to the Wellness Centre.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

Starting in June of 2021, numerous City of Saskatoon (City) departments along with other stakeholders have met and worked collaboratively regarding perceived safety and cleanliness near an existing downtown shelter/ supported living facility, often referred to as The Lighthouse. This was an initiative led by the City to have open dialogue and create a collaborative approach to identify responsibilities and desired outcomes.

An initial review of current service levels was assessed and from this, a determination of how each stakeholder could adjust service delivery to be part of better outcomes was identified. Some of the changes in approach and levels of service that resulted from those meetings included:

- Modified garbage collection,
- Increased pressure washing of sidewalks,

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- Increased retrieval of sharps, and
- Increased presence by Saskatoon Fire Department (SFD), Saskatoon Police Service (SPS), and Community Support Officers (CSO's)

Some of this work can be extended to improve upon the public realm around the Wellness Centre.

Since the opening of the new Wellness Centre in December 2021, the STC has been facilitating biweekly meetings with STC, SPS, SFD, Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA), and other contracted partners. Status updates are provided, items for resolve are prioritized, and next steps are determined. All parties are committed to coming up with alternative approaches in hopes of achieving long-term solutions.

An example of this is through the use of a “Peacekeeper” model, which has been an integral component of success for the Wellness Centre. The Peacekeeper model started as an STC employee, who was trained to ensure safety within the Wellness Centre. The process for people entering the building includes safety measures such as use of metal wand detection, removal of shoes and removal of exterior bulky clothing. This process is facilitated by the Peacekeepers in a respectful manner.

With warmer weather, more people are gathering outside, which is encouraged and welcome. Gathering is not the issue, and the City and its partners are in no way attempting to discourage people from gathering and socializing in public areas.

The City and its partners are focused on mitigating any increase in vandalism, garbage, and open drug use around the exterior of the building. An enhanced Peacekeeper model has been implemented to perform perimeter checks every 15 minutes, to communicate with those gathered and play a role in encouraging respect for the public realm.

Part of the commitment of the Wellness Centre, to support relatives from homeless, to shelter, to transitional housing, has been providing opportunities for employment. Some of the relatives have been provided the opportunity to develop a sense of responsibility through picking up garbage, cleaning windows, sweeping sidewalks, and other tasks.

The committee led by the City, involves customer-facing and strategic partners. The committee is taking a shared responsibility to achieve agreed upon outcomes. An asset-based approach is used to determine current service levels within the downtown area and build on those. Initially meetings will take place weekly to discuss current service levels, outcomes, potential improvements, and lessons learned. The goal is to continually improve downtown safety and well-being through solutions that are mutually beneficial for all stakeholders, relatives, and the downtown community.

A summary of the service levels and role of each partner is as follows:

Saskatoon Fire Department

- Continue to lead the committee.
- Prioritized districts have been implemented for inspections and property maintenance.
- Inspectors and Bylaw Officers dedicated to encampment process will have focused efforts on downtown areas.
- Continued communication with relatives to build relationships and trust near shelters, the Wellness Centre, and across the downtown.

Saskatoon Police Service

- Attendance to the Wellness Centre includes Alternative Response Officers and Patrol Officers (foot and bike) attending several times a day.
- Work with Peacekeepers on situations outside the Wellness Centre.
- Will identify ways to enhance the Peacekeeper training model and assist in training Peacekeepers.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)

- Develop a crime activity profile review.
- Review the Wellness Centre's planned site improvements, if any.
- Prepare technical audit materials.
- Undertake technical audit of the Wellness Centre, including evaluation of a dedicated outdoor space such as a parking patio.
- Prepare CPTED report with recommendations.

Utilities and Environment

- A further assessment will be completed to determine if an increased service level is also required by the City for emptying waste containers.

Saskatoon Land

- In collaboration with the Solicitors Department, manage the Lease Agreement with STC for use of the 145 – 1st Avenue North building.
- Currently works with the property management company to ensure property is maintained, coordinates any repairs, and deals with concerns.
- A current evaluation is being conducted related to cleaning windows and sidewalks that could include regular-scheduled power washing for the Wellness Centre block.

Community Support Program (CSP)

- Connect people with agencies, work is important to share information related to community outreach.

Saskatoon Tribal Council

- Re-establish a new service model based on learnings, deficits realized, and data gathered. Understanding needs, weather impacts (cold weather model vs warm weather model), and how to best address these needs.
- Increased staffing levels and adjust ratio seeing 40% of staff focused on safety and maintenance. (goal is to have 5 Peacekeepers and 1 Maintenance staff every shift – currently 2 Peacekeepers and no Maintenance staff).
- With proper equipment and training, Wellness Centre staff and relatives will engage more actively in respecting and maintaining the property.
- Prioritizing regular perimeter checks, additional cleaning, and increased level of outreach.
- Corrective actions identified through regular communication.
- Continued utilization of outreach services to provide intakes for transitional housing when appropriate.
- The Wellness Centre is picking up garbage and debris regularly, and service will be adjusted if required.
- Relatives of the Wellness Centre have been sweeping sidewalks, and cleaning windows.

Currently, concerns from stakeholders are directed through various channels. Through consultation, it has been determined that a conduit and regular check in meetings will be valuable to address concerns and develop processes and positive outcomes. A subcommittee will involve the Downtown Business Improvement District (BID), neighbouring businesses, Saskatoon Real Estate, ICR Commercial Real Estate, and STC.

The roles and responsibilities above will be continually evaluated as will conditions in the Downtown core. Responses will evolve over the next year as we learn more about successes and challenges faced.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The funding implications for the lease have been addressed through previous reports. Service level increases for additional operating costs associated with garbage collection, weekly cleaning of the sidewalk, and cleaning of windows are not expected to be significant. Final costs will be dependent on frequency of cleaning and the use of STC resources to perform the service. These and any other costs will be documented, reported, and are not expected to exceed \$20,000.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

At this time, there are no additional legal, social, or environmental implications.

NEXT STEPS

- Continue regular meetings with a focus on cleanliness and safety for the downtown area through a collaborative approach to achieving agreed upon outcomes
- Report back to Council in six months

Report Approval

Written by: Morgan Hackl, Fire Chief
Reviewed by: Lynne Lacroix, General Manager, Community Services
Frank Long, Director, Saskatoon Land
Clae Hack, Chief Financial Officer
Jodi Manastyrski, Senior Solicitor
Approved by: Jeff Jorgenson, City Manager

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