

Council seeks partners for safer community

(Penticton, BC – August 31, 2022) – City council will lay out the need for partners in creating a safe, secure and healthy community to as many provincial cabinet ministers who will listen.

“Our goal this year at UBCM is to keep these issues alive, not to let them slide onto the backburner until there’s a major flare up that grabs the media’s attention,” says Mayor John Vassilaki. “Council has taken many steps towards creating a safer community but we’re at the stage where we need partners to step up and take action. The issues remain and we can’t do this alone.”

The top priority for Council is the immediate need for a Car 40 program in Penticton that pairs a mental health professional with a police officer in responding to mental health calls. The program has the support of the local police and other organizations but there’s been no movement from Interior Health.

“We have a motion urging the province to support a provincial program with appropriate and sustainable funding,” says Vassilaki. “We’re going straight to Health Minister Adrian Dix and Mental Health and Addictions Minister Sheila Malcolmson. The province says all the right words and we’ll be looking for the right actions – funding.”

The City has requested meetings with Municipal Affairs Minister Nathan Cullen, Minister of Health Adrian Dix, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions Sheila Malcolmson and Public Safety Minister Mike Farnworth to discuss the urgent need for action.

As well, Council will be discussing the challenges that lack of support through programs like Car 40 has on communities with colleagues and at issue-specific workshops.

Providing appropriate housing is one of those issues, as a recent survey completed by BC Housing identified major gaps in the types of accommodation and services provided to those who are suffering from trauma, addiction and mental health issues in Penticton.

“We’re worried there is going to be significant slowing of support due to the extreme changes at BC Housing,” says Vassilaki. “We have a simple request of the province: work with us and let’s do it right. All of our residents deserve to feel safe and cared for and unilateral actions don’t do that.”

As well, the ongoing challenge of ‘catch-and-release’ of prolific offenders is on the agenda.

“It’s a problem plaguing communities across the province and we need the provincial government to do something about it,” says Vassilaki. “The police are doing everything they can but 20 prolific offenders in Penticton are averaging more than 90 contacts. It’s not sustainable for the officers and it’s creating challenges for residents. It needs to stop.”

Council is travelling to Whistler between September 12 and 16 to attend the meeting of the Union of British Columbia Municipalities. This annual event brings together local government and First Nations to identify key policy issues and engage with representatives of the provincial and federal governments.

A complete itinerary of council's meetings, workshops and clinics will be released next week.

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