

Consultations show broad support for Safe Public Places bylaw

(Penticton, BC – May 12, 2023) – Following public consultations and discussion with Interior Health, staff are recommending Council proceed with the Safe Public Places bylaw.

“This bylaw is designed to ensure a safer and more secure Penticton by clearly laying out expected behaviours in public places, ranging from disorderly conduct and public nuisances to public substance use, so that we can ensure community safety,” says Blake Laven, the City’s director of development services. “Overall, there is wide support for the intent of the bylaw and for providing Community Safety Officers with more authority to enforce the provisions and for allowing Community Safety Officers to respond to these types of calls, as opposed to the RCMP, which can be freed up to deal with higher level criminal matters.”

First introduced in March, the bylaw was developed over the course of two years in response to community concerns around safety and the unsustainable level of social nuisance and disturbance calls directed to the RCMP. During the development of the bylaw, the federal and provincial governments began a three-year pilot program decriminalizing the possession of small amounts of previously illegal substances. The bylaw provides exemptions for substance use in designated areas in order to direct individuals to use in safe spaces – following the intent of the drug decriminalization pilot project.

City staff met with Dr. Sue Pollock, the regional medical health officer for Interior Health, to discuss the bylaw, focusing on the public consumption of illicit substances. While recognizing the need to consider overall public safety, Interior Health raised concerns about re-stigmatizing drug use, reiterated waiting six months before proceeding and suggested not imposing punitive measures such as fines.

“The bylaw is designed to provide a safe environment for all community members, and by providing exemptions for use in designated areas, it creates a balanced approach,” says Laven. “Our goal is to ensure that everyone feels safe, including those struggling with addictions issues. We will continue to work with Interior Health and other groups to ensure safe spaces exist and continue advocating for more resources.”

Staff also conducted extensive public consultation, with the results showing a high concern around safety in the community and the need to regulate public behaviours.

“After reviewing the feedback and discussion with other groups, there is an overwhelming consensus that the bylaw is headed in the right direction,” says Laven.

The recommendation will be presented to Council at the May 16 meeting. Also on the agenda is an update from the Public Safety Working Group and the latest crime stats from the RCMP.

-30-

Media Contact:

250-490-2339

communications@penticton.ca