

Town of Riverview COUNCIL REPORT FORM



Presented to: Mayor and Town Council

Presented by: Colin Smith

Date: December 12, 2022

Subject: Call for Action – Downtown crime & social issues

Background

The issue of homelessness in Greater Moncton and the associated social issues and challenges have been highlighted recently as a growing challenge faced in our region. The City of Moncton has recently received a public presentation on the increasing number of individuals living rough in our community and the need for support. As a result, the city has recently made the decision to convert its Lion's Centre on St George Street into a shelter to increase shelter capacity in the community. As well last week there was a news conference where the businesses community groups released a call for action for governments (predominantly Provincial areas of influence) to take immediate action to address the issues of homelessness, downtown and property crime and open-air use of drugs. The call for action is attached for Council's reference.

While the Town does see, and experience individuals experiencing homelessness it is not to the same degree in the downtown. In 2022, the Town responded to and addressed 9 encampments.

Over the past year, the Mayor has indicated to the Chamber of Commerce, City of Moncton and other partners that the Town of Riverview is prepared to support the ongoing efforts to address these challenges, whether that includes advocacy; participation in regional meetings; or direct engagement with the Province on these matters. Those groups did not engage the Mayor on their initiatives in a significant way in 2022. The Mayor also has nominated Councillor Hayward to sit on the Greater Moncton Homelessness Committee to ensure we were part of those discussions.

The Town has not received a formal request for support or engagement on these various social issues however, recently, there has been informal discussions on what support the Town can provide the City; Province and non-profit groups with the current ongoing issues on the Downtown streets. Furthermore, the Town is aware of the Province's local government reform process. Starting in 2024 the province appears to be transferring the accountability for social issues to the regional service commission, with no clear indication if it is also transferring funding or income taxing capabilities for the Commission to properly fund those services.

In previous meetings the members of Council have expressed a desire for the Town to take some action on these issues. However, there was no clear direction of what steps the Town should be taking.

Based on previous discussions and thoughts from members of Council, a proposed action plan for Council could be as follows:

1. The Town to draft a letter to the Province indicating the Town's support of the GM business groups' calls for action and is advocating for the province to respond. Key actions that will be noted by the Town in the letter are:
 - The Town will support the tri-community request/advocacy for Codiac RCMP to address property crimes and open-air drug use in our communities. (While the municipalities cannot direct day to day operations, the Town has already acted by seeking a meeting with the Assistant Commissioner to discuss this call for priority action from the communities on these issues.)
 - The Town to lobby the Province to ensure there is appropriate shelter capacity in the Downtown to prevent widespread loitering, encampments, aggressive panhandling and squatting on both public and private land.
 - The Town supports the request for a Mental Health and Addictions Court in Moncton with appropriate restorative justice and rehabilitation programs. And the Town will advocate for increased investments in adequate health care and mental health services to support such programs in GM.
 - The Town supports and advocates for the Province to increase its investment in adequate resources for mental health and addiction recovery programs in our region.
 - The Town supports the call for both Provincial and Federal governments to provide and maintain additional funding for affordable housing and wrap around services for the vulnerable population. (More affordable housing units needed throughout the region).
2. As part of the Town's 2023 operational plan, we will be completing a housing needs assessment for Riverview and if Council so desires it could also engage the consultant to develop an affordable housing strategy for Riverview once that assessment is completed.
3. The Town will explore ways to promote community awareness of social services in our region via social media:
 - Promote call for the volunteers to support the new shelter when the call out is made by the agency selected to operate that facility.
 - Share information with Riverview residents on where they can access a summary of social services available for individuals in need. The most logical tool to make residents aware of is 211.
4. The Town will draft a separate letter (in early 2023) to the Province documenting the Town's concerns that the Province's current strategy on the broader social issues occurring in NB (i.e., homelessness; affordable housing; community support services, etc.) is simply to download those activities to the municipalities through the local government reform process and the new roles defined for the regional services commission in 2024. To transfer these services without the funding level necessary to support their successful delivery should not occur.
5. The Town will continue to consider supporting the operations of the local non profits that provide on the ground support services to the vulnerable population if the Town receives grant requests through its annual grant process (i.e., Salvus Clinic; Albert County Food Bank; Harvest House; YMCA Reconnect; etc.)

CONSIDERATIONS

Legal: n/a

Financial: there could be significant financial implications to the Town if action is taken beyond advocacy

Policy: n/a

Stakeholders: Moncton, Dieppe, Regional Service Commission

Strategic Plan: a safe and welcoming community

Interdepartmental Consultation: n/a

Communication Plan: n/a

RECOMMENDATION FROM STAFF

That Town Council approved the action plan included in the Council Report Form presented to Council on December 12, 2022.