

NO: R192

COUNCIL DATE: November 20, 2023

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **November 16, 2023**
FROM: **General Manager, Community Services** FILE: **4710-01**
SUBJECT: **Developing an Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy –
Community Engagement**

RECOMMENDATION

The Community Services Department recommends that Council receive this report for information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information on the development of the Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy.

BACKGROUND

In 2017, the City launched its Public Safety Strategy. Since this time, Surrey has continued to grow rapidly, and new challenges and issues have emerged, particularly given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Appendix “I” provides an overview of the current status of programs under the Public Safety Strategy.

The Public Safety Committee, with input from the Livability and Social Equity Committee, directed staff to develop and launch an Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy (the “Strategy”).

To move forward with development of the Strategy, staff have prepared an engagement plan. Appendix “II” shows the roadmap and timeline for completion of engagement and development of the Strategy. Staff will forward a draft Strategy for Council endorsement in Q2 2024, following review and authorization by the Public Safety and Liveability and Social Equity Committees.

DISCUSSION

Community Engagement Approach

Development of the Strategy will be informed by both targeted and broad-based engagement with community members and key interest groups (e.g., business groups, neighbourhood organizations, and service providers) and by the best practices research conducted by staff, as described in the background paper, attached as Appendix “III”.

The community engagement campaign will launch in November 2023 and will likely conclude in January 2024. The communication plan is attached as Appendix "IV". To maximize the reach of the community engagement campaign, the City will be advertising to encourage public participation at a number of City events.

Through a wide variety of public engagement methods (e.g., survey, workshops, focus groups) the City will collate and analyse qualitative data that will support and inform the development of a strategy in line with leading practices from other communities. These events and engagement sessions are also an opportunity to promote the existing services provided by the City (i.e., fire services, RCMP, parks and recreation) and to encourage people to access these existing services.

It is important to note that many City programs and services are already leading examples of best practices, and these will be integrated into the Strategy to ensure that they receive the appropriate attention and support in the future. These include the Surrey Anti-Gang Family Empowerment ("SAFE") program, and existing initiatives such as the Surrey Fire Service's Home Safe program and the Street SMART program managed by Bylaw Services and Community Services. The Strategy is also likely to recommend new programs and services as well as enhancements to existing services based on feedback received from community members.

CONCLUSION

Staff are providing this report to Council support for information on the development of the Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy, as generally described in this report.

Terry Waterhouse
General Manager, Community Services

Appendix "I": Public Safety Program Updates
Appendix "II": Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy Roadmap
Appendix "III": Background paper on Community Safety and Wellbeing
Appendix "IV": Communication Plan

Public Safety Programs Update



Operationalized and Ongoing Programs

1. Age Friendly Strategy for Seniors
2. Block Watch
3. Business Safety Surveys
4. Gang Exiting Pilot (End Gang Life)
5. City Centre Response Plan (was SOT now PMHOT)
6. Community Enhancement Program
7. Community Safety Centre (SAFE Centre)
8. Community Safety Support
9. Critical hours Programming (MyZone)
10. Distressed Properties Response Program
11. Diversity Outreach Program
12. Home Safe
13. Inter-Agency Case Assessment Team (ICAT)
14. Mini-Blue & Code Blue
15. Project IRIS – CCTV Registry
16. Road Safety Education and Awareness
17. Safe and Active Schools Program
18. Surrey Emergency Program
19. Surrey Libraries Information Access & Literacy Support
20. Surrey Mobilization and Resiliency Table (SMART)
21. WRAParound Program
22. YoBro, YoGirl Initiative
23. Youth Mentorship Program



Completed Programs

1. Volunteerism, Building Community
2. Early Years – Avenues of Change
3. Girls Got Game
4. Clayton Heights Activity Team (CHAT)
5. Cyber Security Outreach Program
6. Newton Safety Unit
7. Network to Eliminate Violence in Relationships (NEVR)
8. Substance Use Awareness Team



Not Advanced

1. Data Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety
2. Integrated Services Network (ISN)
3. Community Services Web Portal

Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy Development

Sept
2023

Planning and preparation of background papers, strategy outline and engagement plan, to receive input and consultation with Public Safety Committee and Livability and Equity Committee.

Oct/Nov
2023

Community Engagement Plan implemented, series of events and gathering of input from community members and stakeholder focus groups to refine plan outline and confirm specific priorities.

Jan
2024

Public Safety Committee receives report on community engagement and provides comment to inform the draft strategy.

Feb
2024

Public Safety Committee receives Strategy report for endorsement recommends (possibly jointly with Livability and Equity Committee) advancement to Council for endorsement.

Mar
2024

Council receives Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy for review and endorsement, directs staff to implement actions, strategy is subsequently launched with events and activities.

Nov
2024

Progress Report to Public Safety Committee on ICSWB measures and plan for ongoing monitoring

Surrey's Evolution to an Integrated Approach to Community Safety and Wellbeing

Background Paper



Introduction

As one of the fastest growing urban communities in Canada, the City of Surrey remains committed to ensuring Surrey remains a safe and inclusive place for everyone to live, work and play.

The City of Surrey is a recognized leader in developing innovative and systemic approaches to tackling safety related priorities in the community. Central to the success of the Surrey model has been the creation of strategic partnerships and the adoption of evidence-informed and leading practices in safety programming that deliver improved outcomes for the community.

Community safety programming in Surrey has remained dynamic aligned with current literature that demonstrates a need to move away from silo-ed responses focused solely on crime

prevention and enforcement to integration of services that address the root causes of social disorder and marginalization in the community.

Established in 2007, Surrey's Crime Reduction Strategy had a focused mandate to increase safety through the reduction of crime. A review of the last 10 years of crime data shows Surrey has reduced its crime severity index (CSI) from 110 to 98 representing a 10 year average of 104. This demonstrates the rates of serious and violent criminality in Surrey are falling over time.

After a brief increase in 2014-15, property crime rates have also declined during this time period with just over 14,000 fewer property crime incidents each year in 2022 than at the peak in 2014. Break and entering offences also peaked in 2014, but in 2022 there are over 3,000 fewer offences per annum representing a drop in the rate of offences per 1000 population of 2.59 points. Fatal collisions attended by police are down from the peak of 1,004 collisions in 2013 to 738 collisions in 2022. While major categories of criminal offences show decreases over the last ten years, police calls for service remain high with 198,720 reported in 2022. A large proportion of these calls are not for criminal activity but are related to social disorder.

While statistical evidence has demonstrated an overall reduction of high-risk criminal activity in Surrey, there has remained a need to further improve perceptions of safety in the community and identify and address the root causes of social disorder in the community.

The Public Safety Strategy launched in 2017 established a comprehensive roadmap to enhance safety and wellbeing for everyone in Surrey. The Public Safety Strategy broadened the scope of community safety programming beyond an emphasis on an absence of crime to further embracing evidence-based, cross-sectoral collaborations focused on addressing aspects of vulnerability. The City continues to monitor the policy and service landscape for community safety to ensure practices in Surrey remain responsive to community needs and align with evidence-based leading practices.

In the years since the PSS was implemented new challenges have emerged and policy has evolved across Canada to broaden the focus from public safety to community safety and wellbeing using integrated approaches.

The community has been dealing with the impacts of the rising of cost of living, the ongoing housing crisis, and the toxic drug poisoning public health emergency, all of which have been compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health response to the pandemic and the toxic drug poisoning crisis have called for the integration of equitable design into service delivery to eliminate further harm to marginalized populations who are disproportionately impacted from these and other crises.

Other changes have also been profound such as in 2023, the BC Government passed legislation to decriminalize possession of small quantities of drugs for personal use. Decriminalization has further cemented the need to apply trauma-informed approaches in community safety

programming that prevent further victimization of individuals who are experiencing complex overlapping challenges. These changes, largely endorsed by the policing community, allow the police to focus on criminal activity and crime prevention and removes some of the burden of regulating social disorder from overworked police agencies. The evolving policy landscape is also responding to increased public demands to establish clear commitments to anti-racism and Reconciliation and to see these commitments reflected in integrated community safety and wellbeing programming.

Given the changing social and political context, it is important to understand the paths taken in Surrey to date, consider the current leading practices and policy frameworks, and determine what is next for Surrey to ensure community safety priorities and social development goals are realized as overall community wellbeing continues to be improved.



The Path to Today

Crime Reduction Strategy

Faced with a rapidly growing and urbanized community and rising calls for concerted efforts to reduce crime, the City launched the Crime Prevention Strategy in 2007. The CRS had four primary objectives of (1) reducing crime and increasing community safety; (2) increasing public involvement in reducing crime, (3) increasing integration between all stakeholders; and (4) improving public awareness of reality vs. perception of crime.

The CRS was focused on establishing a collaborative approach to responding to crime in the community. The initiatives undertaken through the CRS were effective in streamlining responses across stakeholders and built strong alliances across the service landscape. Furthermore, the CRS successfully engaged the community in a collective dialogue on preventing crime and reduced the perceived lack of safety in the community.

Aligned with the trajectory of community safety policy across Canada, the City's CRS provided the foundation for collaboration among stakeholders and broaden the shared understanding of the root causes of crime.

Public Safety Strategy, "Taking Action Together"

The adoption of the Public Safety Strategy (PSS) in 2017 served as a catalyst for transforming the City of Surrey's approach towards community safety through a clear articulation of the need for a data-driven, multi-sectoral and systems-level response to safety policies and programming that prioritized social wellbeing as a critical contributor to community safety. The PSS established three foundational goals of (1) increase Feelings of Safety in Our Community; (2) Improved Quality of Life for Everyone; and (3) Increased Opportunities for Civic Participation. The implementation of PSS signalled a movement to reimagine community safety programming through multi-dimensional initiatives beyond crime prevention that are critical for a fostering a holistic sense of safety for community members.

Community Spotlight: City of Ottawa's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan

Recognizing the shared responsibility of building a safe and healthy community, the City of Ottawa collaborated with community partners and residents to identify six priorities, narrowed down from twenty focus areas to develop their Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan. Each of these priorities has two or three goals.

One of the programs within the Mental Wellbeing priority is to "Work with partners to explore safer alternatives for mental health crises response." Ottawa is undertaking priority work to establish an 24/7 alternative to the 911 response for mental health and substance use crisis calls. This is intended to lead to a community-based and civilian led multi-disciplinary mobile crisis response team that is trauma informed and culturally appropriate to respond more effectively to these calls and avoid the criminalization of marginalized groups.

City of Ottawa. 2021. Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

The goals of the PSS were further articulated through four priorities of (1) Prevent and Reduce Crime; (2) Ensure Safe Places; (3) Build Community Capacity; and (4) Support Vulnerable People. These priorities were realized through the implementation of 34 existing and new programs. The PSS used evidence-based approaches to crime prevention, safe transportation, early intervention, capacity building, and education initiatives.¹

In June 2018, Council received a progress report on the PSS strategic initiatives. Twenty-three of the initiatives have now been operationalized within the City or its partners and work is ongoing in some form. Eight initiatives were substantively completed or passed on to others to complete distinct from the strategy. The remaining three initiatives were not advanced due to a lack of provincial support, changing needs, and absorption into other strategies within City departments.

The PSS was instrumental in highlighting the importance of integrated and evidence-based approaches to address identified risk factors. The implementation of the PSS established a pathway for continuous improvement of community safety programming to proactively and collaboratively maintain a safe city that has a thriving community. Since the implementation of the PSS in 2017, the City has continued to investigate opportunities for new programs and updated research on the evolving literature on community safety. Programs have been revised and adjusted as needed to ensure optimal delivery.

Mayor's Taskforce on Gang Violence Prevention

Preventing gun violence and disrupting pathways to gang involvement was a key facet of the PSS and led to the Mayor's Task Force on Gang Violence Prevention in 2018. This taskforce brought together 23 community partners with representatives from across the system to put forth recommendations on eradicating gang violence.² The Task Force recommended a collaborative approach to design prevention and early intervention programs at the neighbourhood level that are gender responsive and culturally appropriate. In addition to the development of localized responses, the City continued its support for RCMP and the Combined Forces Specialized Enforcement Unit of BC (CFSEU-BC) to amplify their programs that disrupt gang activity. The taskforce further reinforced the need for programs to be responsive to specific issues especially in the design and delivery of programs focused on early intervention with youth and their families.

Surrey Anti-Gang Family Empowerment (SAFE) Program

The single greatest outcome from the taskforce was the evolution of the SAFE program. SAFE has become the cornerstone of the City's approach towards supporting youth and their families. While originally anchored in a focus on disrupting gang involvement in the community, SAFE programs have shown to have wider ranging benefits and improved outcomes with lowered risk

¹ City of Surrey. 2017. Public Safety Strategy "Taking Action Together"

² Mayor's Taskforce on Gang Violence Prevention. 2018. "Tackling Gang Violence Together: Taking actions on findings of the Mayor's Task Force on Gang Violence Prevention."

for youth. Funded through a five-year \$7.5 million grant from Public Safety Canada, SAFE comprises of 11 programs providing prevention and early intervention services that are delivered through 10 cross-sectoral partners. Between January 2019-March 2023, SAFE has offered supports to almost four thousand children and youth in addition to supporting 515 parents and caregivers in the community.³

Foundational to SAFE programming has been the inclusion of services for addressing trauma, mental health, education, and capacity building. The success of SAFE in filling in key gaps in the community has demonstrated the efficacy of integrated and coordinated approaches focused on the root causes of the vulnerabilities within the community that lead to poor wellbeing and a lack of safety.

Execution of the PSS and the development of subsequent community safety programming has enhanced the City of Surrey’s capacity to proactively respond to existing and emerging priorities for safety and wellbeing in the community.



³ Surrey Anti-Gang Family Empowerment Program. 2023. Program Update.

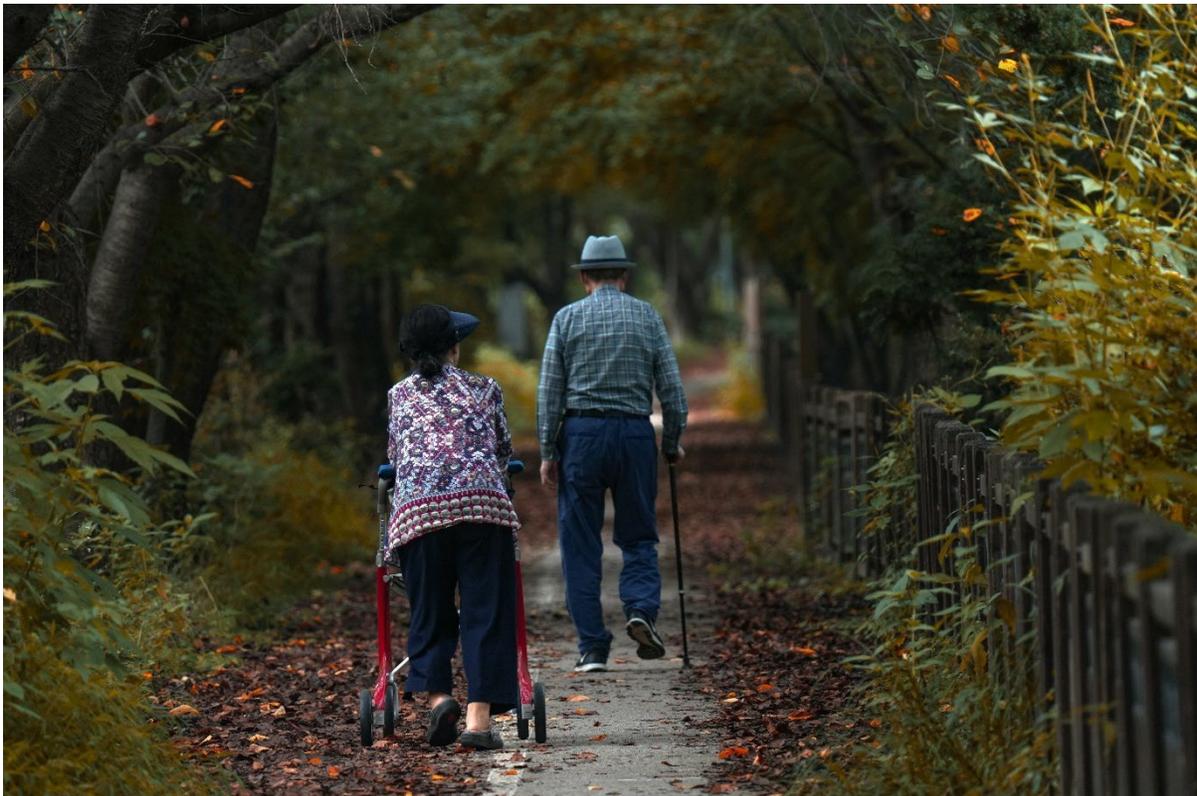
A Changing Policy & Intervention Landscape

Across Canada and globally, jurisdictions are increasingly incorporating social wellbeing as a co-existing priority for community safety. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on defining community safety beyond just an absence of crime and violence. As Surrey has focused on taking action through programs under the PSS, the Taskforce, and SAFE, other jurisdictions have been refining their understanding of safety in a broader context and legislation has mandated a focused on integrated solutions in some areas.

Defining Community Safety and Wellbeing Today

Continuing this evolution of the City's approach to safety in the community requires a clear definition of community safety and wellbeing (CSWB) to establish an analytical lens that incorporates evidence-based, integrated, and system-level approaches in the delivery of responses.

The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has set Goal 11 to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The UN further articulates sub-goals to achieve safety in cities through the provision of critical services such as affordable housing, safe and accessible transportation, green spaces, sustainable urban development, and prioritization of the needs of marginalized groups.



The Canadian Municipal Network for Crime Prevention (CMNCP) defines community safety and wellbeing as:

“a sustainable state where everyone in the community is safe, feels a sense of belonging, has opportunities for engagement and participation, and individuals and families are able to meet their needs for education, healthcare, food, housing, income, and social and cultural expression. This is achieved through long-term, collaborative efforts to promote CSWB and reduce crime and other risks in the community using evidenced based responses that address unique local circumstances and the needs of residents.”⁴

Across Canada, leading examples of CSWB planning signal transition to a more holistic and multi-dimensional definition for community safety that rely on the development of localized strategies to deliver integrated upstream responses to crime prevention and social development.

The Ontario Government has established four streams in their provincially mandated *Community Safety and Wellbeing Planning Framework* that include:

- (1) Social Development;
- (2) Prevention;
- (3) Risk Intervention; and
- (4) Incident Response.

Under this approach, communities in Ontario are guided to develop programming that employ upstream social development strategies with multidisciplinary and long-term investments that seek to improve the social determinants of health.

In addition to social investments, continued resourcing of midstream prevention based programming is required to proactively reduce identified risks. The effectiveness of these investments is assisted by cross-sectoral integration and sharing of information. Downstream risk intervention is a critical component of CSWB response to mitigate elevated risk in the community that stops immediate harm from occurring. Lastly, immediate and appropriate incident response is critical to ensuring the relevant service providers are responding to prevent further victimization and allocate resources in an effective and fiscally responsible manner.

⁴ Canadian Municipal Network for Crime Prevention. 2020. “Practitioner Guide on Crime Prevention and Community Safety & Wellbeing Planning.”

Community Spotlight: City of Edmonton's Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy

In recognition of the disproportionately greater risks to personal safety and wellbeing experienced by people who face systemic discrimination at the intersection of their identities, the City of Edmonton developed their Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy in 2022 through a seven-pillar framework that responds to these critical needs in the community. These seven pillars include Anti-racism; Reconciliation; Safe and Inclusive Spaces, Equitable Policies, Procedures, Standards, and Guidelines; Pathways In and Out of Poverty; Crime Prevention and Crisis Intervention; and Wellbeing.

The City of Edmonton made a conscious effort to place the community at the center of their model and apply an equity lens to determine services and supports reach everyone and especially those with the greatest need. A public dashboard has been made available to track progress across the seven pillars and provide latest trends on safety and wellbeing indicators including health, social inclusion, crime, education, and recreation. Edmonton's articulation of a definition of CSWB highlights the comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach undertaken by City to support the safety and wellbeing of each person.

Within the CSWB Strategy, Edmonton describes *safety* as comprising of three components that include: cultural safety; social and psychological safety; and physical safety. Cultural Safety requires all people to be respected and safe when interacting with the system and services are free of discrimination. Social and Psychological Safety requires people to have a sense of safety around other people in safe and secure settings. Physical safety requires the absence of physical injury and harm. The Strategy further describes *wellbeing* as including the social determinants of health and connection, social inclusion, and belonging.

City of Edmonton. 2022. *Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy*

Role of Policing in Community Safety and Wellbeing

While a refreshed approach to community and safety and wellbeing requires consideration of the broader and varied determinants of safety, policing will remain critical in addressing criminality in the community. Responses to tackling serious crime and violence will require a collaborative approach with policing at the center.

However, the current first response model leaves the police as the default agency to deal with issues of social disorder and mental distress rather than allowing police to focus on criminality. The toxic drug poisoning crisis is a public health emergency that imposes high policing costs on the community due to the number of calls for service related to drug poisonings. Reliance on police to respond to public health emergencies strains and diverts policing resources from focusing on crime and leads to greater victimization of the individuals at risk-of-harm.

Between 2019 to 2020, an average of 198,595 occurrences were reported to police in Surrey and of which less than 18% of the occurrences involved property or violent crime or enacted the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act. Proceedings from the 2020 Justice Summit echoed

calls for a reduced reliance on police for non-criminal occurrences while shifting towards more health and social interventions.

The Intersection of Substance Use, Mental Health, and Homelessness

Stigma associated with substance use creates perceptions of overdose deaths being concentrated among people experiencing homelessness who are street entrenched. However, the problem is much broader as most deaths occur in residential settings, highlighting the need to understand the intersecting social, economic, and psychological factors that contribute to addictions and overdose.⁵ Traditional criminal justice and enforcement approaches have not led to a reduction in substance use and addictions. The BC Coroners Service recorded 1,455 unregulated overdose deaths between January and July 2023 marking the largest number of overdose deaths ever reported in the first seven months of a calendar year. More alarmingly, nine percent of these deaths occurred in Surrey.⁶

Incident response relies heavily on law enforcement and other first responders that are not equipped to support individuals facing complex health challenges, who would instead benefit from upstream social support and health responses. Decriminalization legislation by the provincial government has been a welcome step across the service landscape, and has been endorsed by policing organizations, as it reduces stigma and barriers to accessing critical services while allowing police to focus on serious crime. Police are not suited to respond effectively to individuals displaying elevated vulnerabilities stemming from complex traumas, mental illness, and addictions. Harm reduction programming is an evidence-based and public health approach to providing essential services to prevent any undue loss of life from substance use. Recognizing substance use as a public health challenge builds support for critical services. The application of a trauma-informed approach is critical in the design of community responses dealing with mental health and addictions occurrences to ensure appropriate resources are available to support the safety and wellbeing of most marginalized community members.

The impact of community members experiencing homelessness on social disorder is profound, but the stigma associated with homelessness disrupts access to and support for essential services that are necessary for reducing harm for not only the individual but also for the community. Discrimination against people living with substance use disorders and/or experiencing homelessness compromises the safety of all community members. Homelessness compounds the challenges faced by individuals dealing with mental health challenges, addictions, and substance use that add to their existing traumas and further alienate them from available resources.

Housing is a basic human right and yet over 700 individuals in Surrey are without a home.⁷ The provision of affordable and adequate housing options for marginalized populations is a key component of fostering safety and wellbeing in the community. The City is currently developing

⁵ BC Coroner Service. 2021. "Illicit Drug Toxicity Deaths by Health Authority."

⁶ BC Coroner Service 2023. Dashboard on Unregulated Drug Deaths – Township of Injury.

⁷ Homelessness Services Association of BC. 2020. 2020-21 Report on Homeless Counts in BC.

a Homelessness Prevention and Response Plan that is anticipated to be finalized in early 2024. The Plan will replace the 2013 Housing the Homeless Plan with an updated analysis of current needs in the community with identified solutions to dealing with persistent challenges to reducing homelessness. The creation of the Plan provides the City with opportunities to renew its approach towards below market housing, while also recognizing the intersection between housing and community safety and wellbeing. It is anticipated that the plan will identify priorities for integration of programming across the system.

Alternative Crisis Response Models

Reducing victimization of individuals exhibiting heightened health vulnerabilities requires new approaches to crisis and emergency response. Emerging practices nation-wide and in the US are highlighting the value of community based crisis intervention programming. These programs dispatch trained community workers and health professionals instead of police to respond to mental health or other non-criminal crises.

Through an alternative response to crisis intervention, community members would be able to access critical supports to be stabilized in the short term and then connected to the necessary systems of support. The City of Eugene in Oregon operates CAHOOTS (Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets) as a mobile crisis intervention program that is able to divert on average up to eight percent of calls from police annually.⁸

Operated by White Bird Clinic in Eugene, CAHOOTS comprises of integrated teams of crisis workers and paramedics who are dispatched through 911 and non-emergency calls for incidents involving a mental health crisis. With an approximate annual budget of \$2 million, CAHOOTS saves the City of Eugene an estimated \$8.5 million in public safety costs, and \$14 million in cost for ambulance services and emergency rooms visits.⁹ CAHOOTS has demonstrated the successful application of a community-based and trauma informed alternative to police emergency response that is better equipped to provide immediate crisis intervention, mediation, and access to critical services.

Implementation of such an alternative crisis response model will require a concerted effort to convene relevant stakeholders and partners across sectors in Surrey to effectively resource the model.

At the provincial level, calls for a community based crisis response model have received widespread support. In 2022 the BC Government released recommendations on transforming approaches towards community safety through the creation of a comprehensive crisis response system based on a continuum of response to mental health, addictions, and other complex social issues with a focus on prevention and community-led responses.¹⁰ The inclusion of

⁸ Eugene Police Department Crime Analysis Unit. 2021. CAHOOTS Program Analysis 2021 Update.

⁹ <https://www.usnews.com/news/cities/articles/2020-07-06/eugene-oregons-30-year-experiment-with-reimagining-public-safety>

¹⁰ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. 2022. Special Parliamentary Committee on Reforming the Police Act. "Transforming Policing and Community Safety in British Columbia."

mental health response within 911 dispatch is a key component of this approach. A new 988 national number will be launched in 2024 which provides direct access to support workers for mental health crisis. The service is not a dispatching model, instead Talk Suicide Canada is funded to provide immediate mental health support to those in crisis calling the 988 number.

Any person can experience a crisis or heightened episodes of emotional duress that pose risk to their safety or the safety of those around them. However, an effective crisis response system must be equipped to support people who are experiencing complex multi-layered challenges. This involves expertise other than policing or other first responders. Implementation of such a model requires integration of services and coordination across police, health, mental health, and social service providers. A crisis care continuum recognizes the varied degrees of crisis intervention needed and responds based on risk. A community-based crisis intervention system would extend beyond crisis support lines that provide 24/7 no-barrier immediate phone or online supports for individuals experiencing situational psychological distress or at risk of self harm.

Evidence is clear for alternative approaches to mental health crisis as 58% of respondents to a 2021 BC Crisis Centre Survey reported a negative interaction with police during a mental

Community Spotlight: “SafeTO: Toronto’s Ten Year Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan”

Launched in 2022, the City of Toronto’s Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan titled “SafeTO” applies a public health approach to advance the safety and wellbeing priorities echoed by their community. Guided by an equity and human rights approach SafeTO lays out seven overarching goals to be achieved over ten years including (1) Reduce Vulnerability; (2) Reduce Violence; (3) Advance Truth and Reconciliation; (4) Promote Healing and Justice; (5) Invest in People; (6) Invest in Neighbourhoods; and (7) Drive Collaboration and Accountability.

Promotion and celebration of the wellbeing and resilience of the community is central to Toronto’s approach. SafeTO moves beyond crime and policing to define community safety to include wellbeing that also redefines the City’s understanding of trauma and builds their capacity to effectively build appropriate responses.

The shift towards a renewed response model for mental health crises is reflected in the 2022 launch of Toronto Community Crisis Service (TCCS) that serves as a community-based non-police response to mental health crisis calls and wellbeing checks. Operating across four wards, TCCS comprises of multi-disciplinary teams of crisis workers who respond to calls based on predetermined dispatch criteria, call type, location, and availability of teams. Within six months of implementation, preliminary program data indicates TCCS has successfully diverted 78% of calls received from 911. Furthermore over 700 referrals were made to community based supports and enrolled over 28% of users in post-crisis case management. Responding to underserved communities included the integration of cultural supports aligned with Afri-centric and West Indian/Caribbean-centric and Indigenous-specific needs.¹

Reference: SafeTO: Toronto’s 10 Year Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan

1 CAMH. 2023 . Toronto Community Crisis Service: Six-month implementation evaluation report.

health crisis.¹¹A response model based on the continuum of crisis care integrates prevention programming and community-led responses to immediate emergency response. This alternative model reduces dependence on police for non-criminal occurrences and leverages police resources when necessary for crisis response incidents involving criminal offences or specific safety risk. *Augmenting crisis supports in the community further builds relationships and restores vital community connections for marginalized groups who carry trauma from regressive historical approaches to mental health crisis response.*

Neighbourhood Safety Offices

A renewed understanding of community safety and wellbeing presents refreshed opportunities to apply localized interventions that build on local knowledge to design solutions. In 2021 the City commissioned a review of neighbourhood based safety approaches in Canada, the US, New Zealand and the UK. This highlighted promising practices in these jurisdictions which may be applicable in the BC context. For example, communities across the United States have grappled with the lasting and dire impacts of gun violence that has disproportionately impacted racialized populations. Starting in 2007, the City of Richmond, California created the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) as a mechanism to counter gun violence. Serving as a deliberate parallel to the criminal justice system, the ONS is based within the local government and resourced with non-police staff.

Relying on the expertise of neighbourhood residents, the ONS removes barriers to participation for marginalized communities and centers their voice in the co-creation of non-police focused interventions. The ONS brings together residents, community stakeholders, and city representatives with oversight from a local board that allows for each neighbourhood to identify and act upon their most urgent priorities for improving their safety and wellbeing. The ONS model has demonstrated immense success as evident in Richmond, California where the city's homicide rate fell by 80% within ten years of launching an ONS.¹² *Deepening our understanding of the efficacy of innovative and evolved approaches to community safety can offer cost-effective and socially just alternatives that can radically transform wellbeing for the community.*

Committing to Equity and Human Rights

Community safety and wellbeing is achieved when each person in the community feels safe and has a deep sense of belonging and connection. However, inherent structural barriers and discrimination emerging from policies and practices inherited from colonial conceptualization of governance perpetuates significant harm for marginalized communities. Conscious efforts to reverse the historical legacies of harm in the community require a commitment to the application of anti-racism and equity in the planning, design, and delivery of policies and

¹¹ BC Crisis Centre. 2022. "Crisis Lines as the 911 Mental Health Option: Issues Brief."

¹² Centre for American Progress. Oct 15 2020. "Beyond Policing: Investing in Offices of Neighborhood Safety."

programming. Growing social awareness of the continued discrimination experienced by marginalized groups who are restricted from accessing opportunities at the intersection of their identities – race, gender, socioeconomic status, ability, and religious – has amplified demands for governments to address persistent social inequities and transform our communities to reflect social justice. Canada is in the midst of a national dialogue on race that is driving calls for explicit and proactive anti-racism policies and programming.

Ensuring that programs are delivered equitably requires a clear understanding of the specific and diverse needs of community members from different backgrounds. Unlike equality, which seeks to provide the same services to all community members in the same way, equitable services recognize and respond to the specific needs of community members. Equitable services are flexibly delivered in the manner that they will be most effective for the intended priority group(s). The Housing and Social Development team within the Community Services Department has been coordinating a process to create a City of Surrey definition of equity to inform future programming and ensure equitable responses for diverse communities within Surrey that will reduce systemic barriers.

Advancing community safety and wellbeing priorities will require devising localized and culturally specific solutions to address the root causes of the lack of safety and wellbeing experienced by marginalized groups.

The final report on the National Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women released in 2019 brought to light the ongoing violence and harm subjected to Indigenous women, girls, and non-binary peoples. Indigenous women in Canada are seven times more likely to be victim of murder and three times more likely to be violently and sexually assaulted.¹³ While gender-based violence impacts all individuals who identify with marginalized gender identities, racism and all forms of discrimination further oppress and subject people with intersecting identities to



¹³ Native Women's Association of Canada. 2021. "Our Calls, Our Actions – NWAC's Action Plan to End the Attack Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and Gender Diverse People."

perpetuating cycles of violence and victimization.

Released in 2023, the Mass Casualty Commission final report exposed the gendered nature of violence and highlighted the systemic failures to recognize and respond to intimate partner and gender based violence that are often precursor to largescale violence against communities. The findings from the Commission expose the barriers faced by women experiencing violence who are further victimized through their interactions with institutions that reinforce cycles of violence. *While individual acts of largescale violence cannot always be predicted, there is a need to safeguard the interests of women who continue to experience violence due to structural discrimination that allows for repeated gender based violence to occur with few consequences for perpetrators.* The Commission report has put forth recommendations to countering gender based violence through leveraging and empowering community based groups and experts in gender-based advocacy.¹⁴

Local governments can play a large role in addressing gender based violence through mobilizing resources and programming to address root causes of gender based violence and implement the necessary interventions to make cities safer for women, girls, and gender diverse community members who face risk of harm from inaction. Prioritizing action against gender-based violence is integral to community safety and wellbeing considering the pandemic exposed the deep vulnerabilities in our communities as gender-based violence surged when access to critical services and social networks was disrupted.

Community Spotlight: “Izatalapa, Mexico: A City’s Transformative Journey to Improving Community Safety and Addressing Stigma”

Starting in 2018 and with a population of 2 million residents, the borough of Izatalapa situated on the outskirts of Mexico City, faced a tall order of addressing the real impacts and the immense stigma of being labelled as the most dangerous city in Mexico for its high rates of violence and crime. Recognizing the comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach needed to address crime, Izatalapa increased investments in community initiatives fostering social cohesion alongside enhancing policing capacity. Izatalapa developed large sports and cultural centres called *Utopias* across the city that offer recreational programming and workshops for community members to learn theatre, music, photography, and athletics. A gendered lens was applied to spatial planning in the borough to address the high rates of violence against women. Part of the Safe Streets Plan included the installation of streetlights in the main avenue of the community illuminating the corridor for pedestrians to convert an area that was historically a spot for serious crime and violence.¹

The installation of over 7000 murals has transformed the grey and neglected urban facades to reflect the area’s deeply vibrant and rich cultural expression. The investments in community safety and wellbeing initiatives have demonstrated success for Izatalapa that is observing a gradual shift away from continuously being perceived as a violent municipality.

¹ Reference: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2021. Izatalapa Report 2021: UNODCity Safety Governance Approach in Urban Environments for Safe, Inclusive, and Resilient Cities

¹⁴ Mass Casualty Commission. 2023. Final Report of the Mass Casualty Commission: Recommendations.

The BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner has made repeated recommendations to build equity into policing and community safety programming. A detailed inquiry by the Commissioner found Indigenous and other racialized groups are overrepresented in arrests, strip checks, and/or chargeable incidents and in mental health incidents with interactions with the police in local communities in BC including Surrey.¹⁵ The perpetual discrimination of Indigenous and racialized peoples across public systems has prompted the provincial government to seek new approaches to community safety that are grounded in the principles of decolonization, anti-racism, community, and accountability.¹⁶

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the life of every person around the world but it also exacerbated pre-existing inequities within communities. The resilience of communities was put to a test as gaps in our social systems became apparent and marginalized people were disproportionately impacted. Social isolation, loss of life, increased restrictions in daily life amplified divisions in communities and an increase in hate-crimes was observed. The BC Human Rights Commission launched an inquiry to further examine the root causes of hate-based crimes and found hate is disproportionately experienced by marginalized communities.¹⁷ Community based supports networks can be an effective response and establish pathways to eradicating hate crimes from communities.

Surrey has a longstanding history of being a welcoming community that is home to diverse communities who add to the vibrancy of the city. As Surrey continues to grow, it is important to ensure all community members are supported, safe, and have access the opportunities they need to thrive.

Rapidly urbanizing communities can offer opportunities for community engagement and collective prosperity but it can also exacerbate social isolation. Seniors can experience heightened vulnerabilities from isolation with real consequences for their physical safety and emotional wellbeing. Newcomers to the community, especially younger students and low-wage workers without access to networks of support, face risk of exploitation, abuse, mental illness, and self-harm. A holistic and comprehensive approach to community safety and wellbeing in Surrey that is grounded in local knowledge and builds upon community strengths is essential to making Surrey into a safe, inclusive, and thriving city for all.

¹⁵ BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. 2021. "Equity is safer: Human rights considerations for policing reform in British Columbia."

¹⁶ Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. 2022. Special Parliamentary Committee on Reforming the Police Act. "Transforming Policing and Community Safety in British Columbia."

¹⁷ BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. 2023. "'From hate to hope: Report of the inquiry into hate in the COVID-19 pandemic."

The Path Forward

The City is committed to applying leading, evidence-informed practices that will build networks of support and resilience to advance community safety and wellbeing. Harnessing the knowledge from a renewed multi-dimensional understanding of safety, the City is well-positioned to build upon its previous success in safety programming to develop an Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy.

An Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy for Surrey will provide the framework to organize existing service provision and further reinforce existing programs with new safety and wellbeing focused interventions aligned to community priorities. Through a meaningful strategic planning process, Surrey will identify the most effective practices, listen to the community, and establish partnerships across the service landscape to integrate service delivery and align approaches.

Every person in Surrey has a right to feel and be safe in their community. Cultivating this perceived and real sense of safety requires collective responsibility to prevent and address violence and seek non-punitive and non-carceral methods to improve the liveability of the community. Poised to become the largest city in BC, Surrey has an opportunity to ensure its continuous growth is equitable and is centered on cultivating safe spaces and resilient communities.

Acknowledging our shared responsibility in reducing harm, restoring relationships, and healing trauma are foundational in the realization of community safety and wellbeing.



Excerpt | Integrated Community Safety and Wellbeing Communication Plan

Goal (big picture/broad)

- A. Obtain insights from community members to develop strategic, long-term and multisectoral responses to community safety and wellbeing challenges.
- B. Develop definitions of community safety and wellbeing that are informed by community members' perspectives.
- C. Increase awareness of community safety and wellbeing programs and services
- D. Identify opportunities to address service gaps and/or enhance community safety and wellbeing programming.

Engagement Objectives

1. Build awareness of the development of integrated community safety and wellbeing strategy.
2. Encourage participation in surveys, events, and dialogues across sectors and from a broad spectrum of community members.
3. Promote confidence in current community safety and wellbeing services.
4. Highlight the value of community input to the strategy.

Implementation Steps

1. Confirm an event list of engagement opportunities and staffing plan.
2. Confirm collateral and marketing assets that can be used at City and other events to promote participation in strategy development and implementation and confirm promotional channels to promote attendance at events and online participation in engagement.
3. Engage with community partners to confirm focus group or stakeholder events and to stimulate participation of their clients and community members.
4. Collect community feedback on community safety and wellbeing through surveys, focus groups/sharing circles, feedback installations, and pop-up events.
5. Facilitate community dialogue on community safety and wellbeing through radio shows and social media engagement.

Communication Guidelines

- Materials will use inclusive, people-first language to maintain the dignity of program participants (e.g., use "populations at-risk" or "people with lived and living experience of homelessness" vs. "homeless people").
- Engagement activities will strive to be inclusive, equitable, and accessible to include and centre the voices of community members who are marginalized and face barriers to participation.
- In efforts to remove barriers to participation, engagement activities will strive to meet people where they are at by identifying and engaging locations frequented by diverse groups.

Tiered Approach to Engagement

We are committed to facilitating a dialogue across the community to understand how diverse groups in experience and perceive community safety and well-being. During the engagement, we will leverage a tiered approach towards our primary audience of community members to provide engagement opportunities that also center the voices of community members who are often most marginalized and yet face the greatest risks.

Tier 1 – Ongoing Partners / Established Connections

This group represents community partners involved in the creation and delivery of services and programs focused on community safety and wellbeing. This group includes representatives of community organizations who have established or developmental relationships with the City. The engagement will also seek to invite newer service focused organizations who may not have fully formed relationships with the City.

Identified Groups: SAFE, SUILC, SVWGG, SYLC, Surrey Pride, SBOT, Surrey Seniors Table, Homelessness Supports; Substance Use Supports, and more

Key Promotional Tactics: Formal correspondence, newsletters, physical and digital ads

Key Engagement Activities: Focus groups/roundtable, interviews, survey, community workshop

Tier 2 – Priority Groups / Areas of Higher Risk

This group represents community members who represent groups experiencing or who have experienced marginalization, victimization, and or inequity that has comprised their safety and wellbeing. Engagement activities within this tier will incorporate a trauma informed approach to minimize any harm that may emerge from discussions that may arouse painful memories or negative emotions. Tier 1 participants can join in Tier 2 activities.

Identified Groups: People with Lived Experience, Youth Facing Challenges, Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence, Seniors, Low-income Groups, Newcomers

Key Promotional Tactics: Invitations to supporting organizations, community champions, physical and digital ads, pop-up events, radio ads

Key Engagement Activities: Sharing circles, survey, community workshop

Tier 3 – General Community

The last tier encompasses engagement that will be targeted across community groups to invite all community members to share their insights. Participants in Tier 1 and Tier 2 can also participate in these engagement activities.

Identified Groups: Residents, community members of all ages, ethnicities, income groups, gender identities

Key Promotional Tactics: Transit ads, newspaper/newsletter ads, pop-up events

Key Engagement Activities: Pop-up events, surveys, radio talk shows, online forums

Engagement Activities

We will facilitate a broad array of engagement activations to meet the community where they are at. A detailed event list will be created separately. The following activations represent the forums that can be used by community members to provide insights for the strategy development. Community ambassadors who represent marginalized community groups will be engaged to support in outreach and promotion of engagement with groups.

Survey

- A low-barrier plain language survey will be a primary source to collect insights and feedback.
- Options for translation services are being explored.

Interviews

- Community ambassadors representing marginalized groups may be interviewed individually if they cannot participate in other engagement activities.

Focus Group / Sharing Circle

- A structured and moderated group discussion with identified community groups to collect insights and feedbacks.
- Trauma informed and sharing circle approach applied for groups with lived experience.

Pop-up Events

- Interactive games and dialogues with community members at high traffic locations to engage broad section of community.
- Informational material share and giveaways for participants.

Community Workshops

- Structured collaborative workshops to gather larger community groups to participate in activities to inform strategy development.
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