



Corporate Report

NO: R141

COUNCIL DATE: July 10, 2006

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: July 10, 2006
FROM: Fire Chief FILE: 0250-07
SUBJECT: 2006 Community Excellence Awards (Best Practice Category – Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection Initiative)

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approve a joint application with Abbotsford to the Union of B.C. Municipalities' 2006 Community Excellence Awards (Best Practices category) for the development of Surrey's Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection initiative and Abbotsford's Public Safety Inspection Team process.

BACKGROUND

In 2005, the Cities of Surrey and Abbotsford both launched demonstration projects that involved city inspections of suspected residential marijuana grow operations. While operating independently of each other, both projects had a parallel objective – to provide cities with a method to quickly, efficiently and legally address the prevalent safety risks of residential marijuana grow operations without the lengthy delays of the criminal justice system. Both pilot projects successfully rendered safe dozens of grow operations and have since become standard procedure in their respective communities, which continue to work to improve their effectiveness.

A key trigger for the inspections in Surrey has been unusual electricity consumption – a hallmark of grow operations. Surrey's continued lobbying and the success of the two demonstration projects has stimulated changes to provincial legislation that now give cities access to electricity consumption data. This will enable widespread adoption of city-led inspections and give B.C.'s communities a strong tool to combat residential grow operations.

INTENT

To obtain the required Council approval for a joint application with Abbotsford to the Union of B.C. Municipalities' 2005 Community Excellence Awards (Best Practices category) for the development of Surrey's Electrical and Fire Safety Inspection initiative and Abbotsford's parallel Public Safety Inspection Team process.

DISCUSSION

Applications for the Union of B.C. Municipalities' annual Community Excellence Awards are due July 14, 2006 and must be supported by a resolution from a Municipal Council or Regional Board. The Best Practices category recognizes local governments that have "improved or revised an existing program or service."

The unrelated but parallel inspection processes introduced by Surrey and Abbotsford share similar objectives and a number of common traits. They are an excellent example of best practices for a variety of reasons:

- **Efficiency:** The inspection teams are making their communities safe from grow operation hazards with minimal use of public resources.
- **Effectiveness:** Both communities have successfully rendered safe dozens of known grow operations by ensuring that building, fire, electrical and other safety hazards are removed.
- **Cost-effectiveness:** Both cities have introduced bylaws to recover the program costs, ensuring their programs' cost-effectiveness. As well, the reduction of fires and police involvement at low-level grow operations will ultimately bring savings in protective services costs.
- **Applicability/transferability:** Surrey and Abbotsford have created a usable and transferable template for other communities to apply, and the resulting legislative changes have given B.C. cities an even stronger tool for dealing with grow operations.
- **Accountability:** Both communities are meeting their communities' needs while remaining fiscally responsible by using bylaws to recoup costs and shield taxpayers.
- **Awareness:** The programs and the legislation they stimulated continue to draw positive media attention, helping create a public perception of local governments as creative problem-solvers.
- **Excellence:** Surrey and Abbotsford's alternate approaches to dealing with grow operations are a stellar example of the type of initiative and innovation that is increasingly required of B.C.'s local governments.

The two cities' inspection team projects clearly meet the three award criteria: improved efficiency, effectiveness and demonstrated cost-effective solutions; applicability to other UBCM members; and improved public accountability and awareness of local government.

CONCLUSION

By applying for this Best Practices award, the Cities of Surrey and Abbotsford have the opportunity to promote the adoption of city-led inspection teams to other B.C. communities and have a greater effect on the province's marijuana "grow-op" problem. The award would also bring both cities recognition for the culture of resourcefulness and adaptability that led to their development of the inspection projects.



Len Garis
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