



Corporate Report

NO: R101

COUNCIL DATE: June 16, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council** DATE: **June 13, 2008**
FROM: **Deputy City Manager** FILE:
SUBJECT: **Strategy to Address Concerns in the Newton Town Centre**

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager's Office recommends that Council:

1. receive this report as information; and
2. endorse the actions as documented in this report for addressing the needs and issues in the Newton Town Centre area.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an update on ongoing efforts and intended actions with respect to addressing current needs and issues in the Newton Town Centre area.

DISCUSSION

Newton Town Centre is recognized in the Surrey Official Community Plan as one of the City's Town Centres and continues to play an important role in the context of Surrey's on-going development. The City has at various points in time made significant investments in the Newton Town Centre to assist in building a strong character and image in this Town Centre. However, it is recognized that the Newton Town Centre needs additional attention to address a number of issues that have been evolving in the area. These include:

- Graffiti;
- Prostitution;
- Litter/Lack of cleanliness of the public realm;
- Nuisance activities and behaviours at several locations (e.g., loitering, intoxication, panhandling, etc.);
- Drug dealing; and
- Poor public perceptions with respect to personal safety.

Strategy to Address Issues/Concerns:

Staff from each of the following Departments held a series of meetings to establish a strategy to address the above-listed concerns and to enhance the image of the Newton Town Centre area:

- Surrey RCMP;
- Engineering;
- Parks, Recreation and Culture;
- Crime Reduction Strategy Manager;
- City Manager's Office;
- By-law Enforcement; and
- Planning and Development.

Discussions also took place with TransLink and BC Hydro.

The strategy includes two components; these being actions that can be taken in the short term (i.e., that can commence immediately) and actions that will occur over a longer time frame. The following sections address each of these components separately:

Short Term Actions:

Graffiti:

Actions: The City uses a contractor known as "Good-bye Graffiti" to remove graffiti the Newton Town Centre area. This contractor responds to calls from Engineering, Bylaw Enforcement and Parks Recreation, and Culture staff. Graffiti continues to be problematic as graffiti left unattended creates an unhealthy atmosphere that perpetuates the problem. City staff from each of Engineering, Bylaw Enforcement and Parks Recreation, and Culture will continue to monitor and report incidences so that prompt action can be taken to remove graffiti on streets and public buildings in the Town Centre and will alert owners of the need to clean graffiti where it is observed on private property. In addition, staff are working on preventative measures to discourage graffiti in the public realm including lighting upgrades, landscaping and surface treatments such as plastic stick-on wraps for hydro, Telus, Cable and traffic signal service boxes that are within the road allowances in the Newton Town Centre.

Prostitution:

Sex trade workers are often observed around the Newton Seniors Centre, Newton Library, and the Newton Wave Pool as well as the parking lots servicing these facilities.

Actions: The RCMP has been undertaking sting operations in this area to eliminate prostitution in the area. Based on police reports there has been a noticeable decrease in the number of prostitutes in the Newton area with arrests of many Johns and Sex Trade Workers over the last few weeks. The RCMP Community Police Office has also placed constables on the street in the Newton Town Centre to walk a beat so as to provide a visible police presence in the area on a day-by-day basis, which further discourages prostitutes from plying their trade in the area. The RCMP will continue to do stings in this area with respect to prostitution and the Community Police Office Commander will be instructing the constables walking the beat in the Newton area

to cover a broader range of routes to ensure that a visible police presence is evident in a wider area of the Town Centre.

Litter/Lack of Cleanliness in the Public Realm:

Litter (drug paraphernalia, liquor bottles, cans, clothing, etc.) and general lack of cleanliness in the public spaces of the Town Centre area was observed as being fairly prevalent and particularly in the vicinity of the Newton Transit Exchange.

Actions: The Engineering Department and Parks Recreation and Culture will undertake a thorough sweeping of the streets and sidewalks of the major streets in the Newton Town Centre and of the City's parking lots and the Transit Exchange in the vicinity of the Newton Recreation Centre. These areas will then be monitored and further sweeping and cleaning will occur on as needed basis.

Nuisance Activities and Behaviour (e.g., loitering, intoxication, panhandling, etc.):

The corridor between the Library Administration and Newton Wave Pool buildings as well as the treed area on the east side of the Library Administration building fronting the south side of 72nd Avenue attract nuisance and criminal behaviour. Recreation centre patrons have expressed concerns regarding using this corridor to access the Recreation Centre from the Transit Exchange that is located on the north side of the Rec Centre fronting 72 Avenue. In addition, intoxicated people are regularly requested to leave the City facilities in the area due to aggressive behaviour, foul language or sleeping in the buildings. Newton residents have complained about being harassed by panhandling activities in the parking lots. Staff, Newton Community Volunteer Patrol members, and the RCMP (when requested to assist) ask individuals to move on whenever panhandling is witnessed.

Actions: The Newton Community Police Station will widen the area covered by foot patrols to address these nuisance behaviours in a larger area of the Town Centre. Similarly, City staff and the Newton Community Volunteer Patrol will place a higher emphasis on patrolling and monitoring the Town Centre area with a view to eliminating loitering, panhandling and other untoward behaviour in the area.

Drug Dealing:

The incidence of drug dealing and drug use in the Newton Town Centre and in particular around the Newton Recreation Centre is relatively high. Staff has noted an increase in pre-teens selling and using drugs and drug deals blatantly occurring at the entrances to the Newton Wave Pool and Newton Library.

Actions: The pay phones have been removed from the Newton Wave Pool, Community Recreation Centre, and Newton Library to reduce "dial-a-dope" activities. The additional emphasis on RCMP foot patrols in the Newton Town Centre area will assist in discouraging this type of criminal behaviour.

RCMP Initiatives:

Actions: Community Outreach programs have been focussed on Crime Prevention as well as working with the homeless through a program called Project Redemption. The Crime Prevention Coordinator is heavily involved in working with the community on numerous issues. The Coordinator has been involved in establishing additional Block Watch Groups with several more at the application stage. The Coordinator has also established a Newton Community Action Group that is comprised of Block Watch members who meet monthly to address immediate issues of concern as well as emerging issues in the community. Newton has an active Community Consultative Group that meets monthly and is led by a business person within the Newton Community. The group is comprised of staff from the RCMP, Bylaw Enforcement and Parks, Recreation & Culture, representatives from a seniors' group, business people, and representatives of other community groups such as the Salvation Army and Options. Community crime and social issues are raised and solutions are collaboratively developed and implemented.

Project Redemption is a program specifically focussing on the homeless. Options Services to Communities Society is a partner in the program. The objective of the program is to seek out homeless individuals within the community and work to address their needs and break the cycle of substance abuse and addiction. With the assistance of other social service agencies, the program has been able to obtain the necessary treatment for homeless people and has been successful in moving several homeless people into rehabilitation. The program is currently being expanded to assist Sex Trade Workers in getting off the street and into rehabilitation.

The Surrey RCMP recognizes the need to focus on the Newton Transit Exchange and immediately surrounding area and has established preventative and proactive patrols in this area to address nuisance behaviours and criminal activity. Foot patrols have been operating on a daily basis since early spring. The foot patrols have generally concentrated on peak demand times such as late afternoons and into the evening. The foot patrols have been able to obtain and develop intelligence on activities that affect the community. They also provide an enhanced visible police presence in the area. RCMP advise that the foot patrols have obtained positive results with a noticeable reduction in the amount of criminal and nuisance activity in the area during the time that the foot patrols have been in operation. An action group has recently formed to specifically deal with the Newton Transit Exchange area. The group is comprised of representatives from TransLink, Coast Mountain Bus Company, City of Surrey (Bylaws, Engineering, Parks, Recreation and Culture), BC Hydro, Telus, Greater Vancouver Transportation Police Service, BC Healthy Communities, and the RCMP.

Beautification Initiatives:

In addition to simply sweeping and cleaning (e.g., picking up the litter) in the public realm of the Town Centre, several beautification initiatives are being pursued.

Newton Wave Pool

Power Washing: The Newton Wave Pool North and West walls have been power washed and the building is clean. The building will be given a fresh coat of paint this summer and significant exterior wall graphics will be installed to animate and beautify the building facades.

The walkway corridor along the North and West walls will be power washed by City crews during the week of June 16, 2008. The columns along the corridor along the East side of the Wave Pool will also be power washed and cleaned.

Painting: The exterior slide on the north side of the Wave Pool and the doors on the north side of the Wave Pool will be painted blue to match the existing wall cladding. The paint will be an epoxy base that will mitigate mould. Painting of these features is scheduled for June but is weather dependant.

Wall Graphics: Seven large 4' X 10' wall panels with images depicting swimming, cycling, bicycling, skating, and youth will be installed on the North and West exterior walls of the Wave Pool. These images represent activities with which the community is involved and will provide a bright and positive environment for the area.

Wall Banners: Two large 16' X 26' banners will be hung off the North facing wall on the left and right side of the water slide. These banners will showcase two of the designs created by the winning artist for the City Banner Program, which will be launched in July 2008. One banner will depict an a designed image of a person and will include the new City logo and message "the future lives here" while the other banner will be a design of people at a pool. These banners will create a significant enhancement with the vibrancy of the colours represented in the new City of Surrey logo.

The wall graphics and banners are scheduled for installation in June 2008.

Newton Streetscape and Transit Exchange

Decorative tree lighting: Each of the sixteen trees in the Newton Transit Exchange has had permanent decorative lighting installed. This has provided an enhanced decorative atmosphere to the environment of the Exchange.

Street Banners: The City Street Banner Program will be launched in the first week of July 2008. The Town Centre area of Newton will have 108 banners installed along King George, 72nd Avenue and 138th Street. The name "Newton" will be included on the banners in to emphasize and market the area.

Newton Signage: The Beautification Coordinator is working with Engineering on options to enhance existing street signage by implementing special signs that reflect the heritage and culture of the Newton area.

Landscaping: Twenty-eight rectangular and round planters will be positioned along 72nd between King George Highway and 137th Street. The planters will accent the streetscape at key intersections and along the west side of the Newton Wave Pool. The planters are scheduled for installation during June 2008.

Vegetation (shrubs, flowers, etc.) within the Newton Bus loop and on the East side of the Newton Wave Pool will be pruned and attended to Parks landscaping crews with a view to ensuring that it is healthy and aesthetically appealing.

Lighting: The Traffic Operations is proceeding with actions to install new lighting fixtures on the 13 poles in the Newton Transit Exchange and will also paint these poles. Enhanced street lighting in the Transit Exchange will discourage criminal and nuisance behaviours at this location.

Bus Shelters: The Contractor “CBS Outdoors” is responsible for maintaining all bus shelters for the City of Surrey. They have replaced all of the glass panels on the four existing shelters at the Newton Transit Exchange at the beginning of June. City staff are pursuing additional options with respect to reducing the incidence of vandalism to the bus shelters.

Newton Entrance Way: The Beautification Coordinator is developing an approach to enhance the intersection of 72nd and King George, which acts as an entrance to the Newton Town Centre. There are currently rhododendrons providing attractive hedging on the North East and North West corners of the intersection and an enhanced seating area on the South West corner. These features will be augmented with a town centre sign or other demarcation opportunities.

Stakeholder Support: The Beautification Coordinator has contacted TransLink and BC Hydro and is working with these other entities to develop a beautification plan for the Transit Exchange. A meeting has been set for June 19, 2008 that will include multiple stakeholders. The following will be discussed with a view to putting a schedule in place:

- Painting the benches within the bus loop area;
- Daily sweeping and garbage clean up;
- Maintenance of garbage cans;
- Removal of newspaper boxes from the bus loop site;
- Enhancement of existing BC Hydro Kiosks with vinyl wraps or murals;
- Maintenance and enhancement of bus shelters; and
- Implementation of visible TransLink security in the area.

These beautification initiatives are intended to send a clear message that the area is important to the broader community.

Longer Term Actions:

In addition, to the actions listed above, there are a number of approaches that will assist in enhancing the Newton Town Centre area over the longer term but which will require more time to plan, budget and implement.

Relocation of the Newton Transit Exchange: TransLink has purchased a 10 acre site fronting the King George Highway to the south of 72 Avenue with a view to implementing a new transit exchange to serve the rapid bus system planned to connect Newton with the Surrey City Centre and Guildford. When implemented in approximately 2 years time, this new exchange will eliminate the existing Transit Exchange and free up the land on which the existing Transit Exchange is located for other civic uses that will animate and beautify the area around the Newton Recreation Centre.

Construction of New Civic Facilities: The City is currently planning a gymnasium addition to the Newton Recreation Centre which will proceed to construction later this year. This addition will be planned and located with due regard to enhancing the environment both surrounding and

within the Newton Wave Pool building. In particular, a focus will be placed on higher visibility of the surrounding area from the building allowing for more natural surveillance of the treed area to the east of the building and the corridor adjacent to the east side of the building.

A study is being undertaken to determine how best to use the treed site to the east of the Newton Wave Pool and Library Administration Building. That site is prone to both nuisance and criminal behaviour and options are being considered with respect to constructing some form of civic building or other amenity on that site in the future to eliminate the “hidden pocket” that it tends to represent at present. Additional information regarding this study will be forwarded to Council in due course.

CONCLUSION

It is recommended that Council endorse the actions as documented in this report that are being undertaken or are proposed to be undertaken by a range of City Departments and others to enhance and revitalize the Newton Town Centre area.

Dan Bottrill
Deputy City Manager