

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: PANHANDLING IN BURNABY HEIGHTS

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council approve the implementation of a pilot "panhandling meter" initiative in the Burnaby Heights area, as outlined in Section 4.0 of the *attached* report.
2. **THAT** a copy of the report be sent to Ms. Claudia Laroye, Heights Merchants Association, 102-4011 Hastings Street, Burnaby, B.C. V5C 2J1.

REPORT

The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee at its meeting held on 1999 September 22, received and adopted the *attached* report recommending an approach for addressing concerns raised by the Heights Merchants Association regarding panhandling in the Burnaby Heights area.

Arising from the Committee's discussion on the report, staff were directed to report on other alternatives to address panhandling.

Respectfully submitted,

Councillor D. Johnston
Chair

Councillor N. Volkow
Vice Chair

<p>:COPY - CITY MANAGER - DIRECTOR ENGINEERING - CITY SOLICITOR - DIRECTOR PLANNING & BUILDING</p>
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TO: CHAIR & MEMBERS 1999 September 14
COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL
PLANNING COMMITTEE

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING Our File: 17.315

SUBJECT: PANHANDLING IN BURNABY HEIGHTS

PURPOSE: To recommend an approach for addressing concerns raised by the Heights Merchants Association regarding panhandling in the Burnaby Heights area.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** Council be asked to approve the implementation of a pilot "panhandling meter" initiative in the Burnaby Heights area, as outlined in Section 4.0 of this report.
2. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Ms. Claudia Laroye, Heights Merchants Association, 102 - 4011 Hastings Street, Burnaby, BC, V5C 2J1.

REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Community Issues & Social Planning Committee, at its meeting of 1999 May 26, received a delegation from the Heights Merchants Association (HMA) regarding concerns with panhandling in the Burnaby Heights area. The delegation indicated that several panhandlers had begun working in the area over the last year or so, and that the situation was a concern to merchants, their customers, and others frequenting the area. The delegation also indicated that the HMA, in conjunction with the Hastings-Brentwood Community Policing Advisory Committee and Gilmore Community Council, had prepared informational cards which encouraged people frequenting Burnaby Heights to give money to the charity of their choice rather than to panhandlers (see Appendix 1, *attached*).

To supplement the information cards, the delegation asked that the City consider two further actions to help address panhandling concerns: 1) undertake preparation of a comprehensive social plan for Burnaby, similar to one done for the City of North Vancouver, and 2) support implementation of a "panhandling meter" initiative, similar to one undertaken by the City of Kamloops.

The Community Issues & Social Planning Committee passed a motion asking staff to investigate the delegation's proposals. This report responds to that request.

2.0 THE PROBLEM

2.1 General

Before looking specifically at solutions, it is important to gain some understanding about panhandling and those that undertake it. Citing various research sources, the Caledon Institute of Social Policy presents the following profile of panhandlers:

Virtually every Canadian beggar suffers from severe poverty. Typically, these people lack the education or skills necessary to obtain, let alone hold, employment. Often they have additional social problems, such as the lack of a supportive network of family and friends. They also may encounter problems of racism, domestic abuse, alcoholism and mental illness. These social problems overlap in ways which defy easy amelioration.

Most people who suffer from such problems do not become beggars; but almost all of those who are to be found begging on the streets fit within this complex matrix of overlapping problems. It must be admitted that there are a few panhandlers who 'do it for fun' - a minority which receives disproportionate and sensationalized media attention. Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of panhandlers who beg on the streets of downtown Canadian cities is drawn from the ranks of the poorest of the poor, with fewer resources of any kind than virtually anyone else in this country.¹

The Caledon Institute also notes that:

Street people in general, and panhandlers in particular, tend to possess few basic literacy skills. For example, the 1996 Addictions Foundation of Manitoba Report found that more than 85 percent had failed to graduate from high school.²

2.2 Burnaby Heights

Based on information provided by the HMA and RCMP, the panhandling situation

¹ Arthur Schafer. *Down and Out in Winnipeg and Toronto: the Ethics of Legislating Against Panhandling*. Caledon Institute of Social Policy. Ottawa. August 1998. Page 2.

² Schafer. Page 8.

in the Burnaby Heights area is as follows:

- panhandlers started moving to the Burnaby Heights area about one and a half years ago
- until recently, eight panhandling "regulars" worked in the area, with six of the eight having Vancouver addresses; the current number of "regulars" is three
- all of the panhandlers have homes (i.e., none is homeless)
- the panhandlers are alleged to be using heroin, seeking money to feed their habits
- the panhandlers often work in shifts, situating themselves in the 4100 block of Hastings, generally by the Red Apple Market or North Burnaby Inn
- while being a nuisance and generating complaints, the panhandlers do not act aggressively in soliciting donations
- the panhandlers realize that Burnaby does not have a bylaw to prohibit or restrict panhandling; provided they do not act aggressively or break other laws, they are aware that the police have no enforcement tools to require them to stop soliciting donations from the public.

3.0 OPTIONS

Burnaby is not alone in dealing with panhandling. A number of jurisdictions across the country have addressed the issue, including Vancouver, Victoria, New Westminster, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Brandon, Oshawa, Calgary, and Sudbury. The approaches can basically be divided into two categories, enforcement and social. Some municipalities use a combination of approaches in dealing with the issue.

The enforcement approach involves bylaws focusing on the panhandlers themselves. The bylaws generally restrict where, how, and when panhandlers can ask for money (e.g., a common feature is to exclude panhandling within a specified distance of automated teller machines). Vancouver and Winnipeg likely have the strictest bylaws, both including provisions for stiff fines and, in Winnipeg's case a possible jail terms of up to six months. The Vancouver and Winnipeg bylaws are currently facing challenges on constitutional grounds in the courts.

Social approaches typically focus on providing alternatives to panhandling: both for the panhandler and general public. Some examples of social approaches are as follows:

- ***Panhandling cards:*** In addition to having panhandling bylaws, the City of New Westminster and Vancouver have developed "panhandling cards." The cards contain a listing of services that may be of use to panhandlers (e.g., food banks, clothing, emergency shelters, drop-in centers). They are distributed to the public through businesses, agencies, and other organizations. When approached by panhandlers,

people are encouraged to give out the cards rather than money. The information cards developed by the HMA differ from those used in Vancouver and New Westminster in that they are targeted exclusively to the public and do not contain a list of services that could be of benefit to panhandlers.

- **Code of conduct:** In 1998, the City of Victoria initiated a public process to develop a "Community Code of Conduct" (see Appendix 2, *attached*). The Code was initially intended to focus on panhandling, but was subsequently expanded to address a range of behaviours deemed unacceptable in the city. The foundation of the Code is mutual respect among all Victoria residents and visitors. The City recently retained social marketing consultants to develop and implement a public education campaign for the Code.
- **Panhandling meters:** As noted, in 1998, the City of Kamloops introduced a panhandling meter initiative, whereby the public is encouraged to give loose change to specially designated meters rather than to panhandlers. Responding to a proposal from the RCMP, the City obtained six meters free of charge from its meter supplier and assumed responsibility for ongoing administration of the program (i.e., collecting and disbursing funds to appropriate agencies, monitoring effectiveness of the initiative).

4.0 PROPOSED APPROACH

In its delegation, the HMA did not ask the City to pursue an enforcement approach to panhandling (i.e., adopt a bylaw). Rather, it asked the City to consider two social approaches: undertaking a comprehensive social plan and implementing a panhandling meter initiative.

With respect to the first request, a social plan would look at Burnaby's population characteristics, existing programs and services, and current and projected program and service requirements. The plan would then provide a strategic direction for the City to pursue in addressing these requirements, acting as either a direct provider, cooperator, funder, or advocate.

In proposing that a social plan be developed, the HMA recognized that panhandling is a symptom of deeper underlying social problems - be they poverty, addictions, mental health, or whatever. For example, in its presentation to the CISPC, the HMA delegation observed that there are no detox facilities in Burnaby. The delegation suggested that a social plan would help the City and community to identify such service gaps and develop appropriate responses. A social plan could thus be a valuable instrument for addressing panhandling concerns and various other existing and emerging issues facing the community.

These points made, launching a social plan would be a major undertaking, requiring a significant commitment of time and resources. For example, the City of North Vancouver recently developed such a plan. To complete the work, the City's two Social Planners devoted 75% of their time to the effort for a one year period (i.e., a total of one and a half person years of a professional's time). The City retained a staff person on a temporary basis to "backfill" the Social Planners' positions to enable the work to be completed.

Burnaby's population is 4.3 times larger than North Vancouver's (179,209 vs. 41,475 in 1996), and its geographic area is 8.4 times larger (106.7 square kilometers vs. 12.7 sq. km.). While not wishing to diminish the quality of the North Vancouver effort, the scope and complexity of developing a similar plan for our city would likely be greater than faced by North Vancouver. Unless sufficient resources were made available, and the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee and Council so directed, the Planning Department would not propose that Burnaby pursue preparation of a social plan at this time.

Pursuit of the HMS's second proposal, a panhandling meter initiative, would be simpler, less expensive, and more immediate than developing a social plan. It must be stressed, however, that the meter initiative would not provide a panacea. The reality is that panhandling meters, in themselves, would not likely be a significant deterrent to panhandlers. Also, it is unlikely that they would attract significant donations (e.g., while not having precise figures available, a contact from the Kamloops RCMP admitted that the meter revenues are "modest"). Further, even if the panhandlers left Burnaby Heights as a result of the initiative, several questions would remain. For example, would the panhandlers merely relocate to another part of the city? Would they pursue other (possibly illegal) ways of raising money? Would attention be paid to the underlying problems that lead people to panhandle?

Provided that expectations are realistic, however, a panhandling meter initiative could have several potential advantages:

- it would provide the City with an opportunity to work in partnership with the HMA in addressing community concerns
- it would require minimal investment from the City (i.e., installation and routine maintenance of the meters)
- it would be a more positive and prudent approach than a panhandling bylaw - especially as the Vancouver and Winnipeg bylaws are currently being challenged in the courts
- it would give the public a socially responsible alternative to giving money directly to panhandlers
- provided that sufficient funds were generated, and the money was allocated to appropriate agencies, it could enhance services available to panhandlers and others in need.

Given the foregoing, it is recommended that the City support a pilot meter program. The proposed course of action is as follows:

- a) The Engineering Department will pursue donation of two parking meters for the initiative (a preliminary contact with Burnaby's meter supplier indicates that the company would be prepared to provide the City with two meters free of charge)
- b) The Engineering Department will install the meters and, subject to other priorities, assume responsibility for routine maintenance. It is proposed that the meters be installed in the 4100 block of Hastings, one on the north side and one on the south. It is also proposed that the meters be painted and situated in such a manner as to be clearly distinguishable from regular parking meters.
- c) The HMA will be asked to develop an operational plan, acceptable to the City, which covers such matters as:
 - proposed agencies to receive funds from the initiative
 - protocols for the collection, deposit, and disbursement of the funds
- d) The HMA will also be asked to assume responsibility for ongoing operation of the meter initiative, including:
 - collecting monies donated to the meters
 - distributing the monies to appropriate agencies.
- e) The City and HMA will jointly monitor the effectiveness of the panhandling meter initiative. Staff will prepare a report for the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee in the fall of 2000 on the findings and conclusions of the monitoring exercise. The report will assess whether the initiative should be continued as is, adjusted in some way, supplemented by other actions, or terminated. If the initiative proves successful, and panhandling becomes a concern in other parts of Burnaby, the report could conceivably recommend that the pilot program be expanded beyond Burnaby Heights.

5.0 CONCLUSION

This report has been prepared in response to concerns raised by the HMA regarding panhandling in the Burnaby Heights area. Specifically, it examined the nature of the panhandling phenomenon, examined approaches used in other jurisdictions, and looked at two suggestions made by the HMA for addressing the issue: development of a social plan and initiation of a panhandling meter program.

To summarize, the key conclusions of the report were as follows:

- while the number of people involved is small, the panhandling situation in Burnaby Heights is a concern to the HMA, RCMP, and general public
- panhandling is a symptom of deeper underlying social problems (e.g., poverty, addictions, mental health, illiteracy)
- several Canadian municipalities have addressed panhandling concerns, using various enforcement and social approaches in their efforts
- a social plan would be a valuable tool to help Burnaby address panhandling and various other existing and emerging social issues; however, given the scope, complexity, and resource requirements involved, the Planning Department would not recommend such an initiative be pursued at this time
- a panhandling meter initiative would not provide a panacea to panhandling concerns; however, provided that expectations were realistic, it would offer several potential advantages (e.g., it would be relatively simple and inexpensive to pursue; it would provide the public with a positive alternative to giving money directly to panhandlers; it would have the potential of raising funds for worthy agencies; it would be a more prudent and positive approach than introduction of a panhandling bylaw; it would provide the City with an opportunity to work in concert with the HMA in addressing the community's concerns).

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that Council be asked to approve the implementation of a pilot "panhandling meter" initiative in the Burnaby Heights area, as outlined in Section 4.0 of this report. It is also recommended that a copy of this report be sent to Ms. Claudia Laroye of the Heights Merchants Association.


D.G. Stenson, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JF\tn
Attachment

cc: City Manager
Director Engineering
City Solicitor

Burnaby Heights Panhandling Card

**REAL CHANGE.
NOT SPARE CHANGE.**



If you really want to give a helping hand,
please stop giving money to panhandlers -
and stop feeling guilty about it.
Instead make a contribution to real change
and give directly to the social service agencies
and charities that are committed to providing aid.



We know that most people on the street suffer
from drug or alcohol addictions. Your loose
change only feeds their addiction. Don't be fooled
by signs saying they want food and shelter.
There are agencies that provide
free meals and shelter every day.

Many panhandlers routinely refuse real assistance
from outreach workers because of the lure of
easy money on the street.

So next time you're asked for change, say no.
Instead make a contribution to a charity of your
choice, that offers food, shelter, counseling,
professional assistance and
a chance for real change.

Please call 294-9060 for a list of
non-profit agencies that need your support.

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Produced by
the Heights Merchants Association,
Hastings-Brentwood Community Policing
Advisory Committee &
the Gilmore Community Council

City of Victoria Community Code of Conduct*

The purpose of this Code of Conduct is to ensure a safe and friendly Downtown for all people who frequent the area. There is a diverse range of needs and values among the various groups who live, work and access shops and services in Downtown Victoria. However, there are a few values that are commonly held. For this reason the foundation of Victoria's "Community Code of Conduct" is RESPECT:

Remember
Everyone
Shares
Public places and
Expects
Courteous and considerate
Treatment

Key points of this Code include:

- Pay attention to pedestrian traffic – please ensure that you and your belongings do not get in other people's way.
- It is not appropriate to relieve yourself on City streets, sidewalks or other public spaces. Plan your activities so that you can use a washroom when you need to.
- Dogs need to be kept on a leash and please remember to clean up after them.
- It is illegal to use or sell illicit drugs. It is also illegal to use alcohol in unlicensed public areas. Please respect these laws while in Victoria's public spaces.
- Licensed establishments should not over serve their patrons and patrons should not be over-intoxicated in public places.
- Ensure that you put garbage and chewing gum in their place – the trash bin!
- In order to avoid a stricter anti-panhandling by-law, please:
 - ⇒ Respect "no means no" when asking for money
 - ⇒ Do not follow or harass anyone.
 - ⇒ Do not panhandle or solicit within 20 feet of ATM's, bus stops, parking ticket dispensers and the entrances of financial institutions.
- Please treat panhandlers/solicitors and everyone in Victoria with courtesy and respect.

* Developed with input from representatives of the Downtown Advisory Committee, The Open Door, Victoria Business Improvement Association, Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Victoria, Downtown Victoria Association, Victoria Cool Aid Society, Victoria Youth Empowerment Society, YM/YWCA, Youth at Risk Network, Victoria Community Economic Development Corporation, youth in Centennial Square, panhandlers, street people and other interested parties.