

CITY OF BURNABY
COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL PLANNING COMMITTEE

*HIS WORSHIP, THE MAYOR
AND COUNCILLORS*

RE: BURNABY HEIGHTS PANHANDLING METER INITIATIVE

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council approve the extension of the pilot Burnaby Heights Panhandling Meter Initiative until mid-2002, at which time staff will submit a further report with recommendations regarding future City support for the initiative.
2. **THAT**, to assist with the aforementioned future staff report, the Heights Merchants Association, on behalf of the Heights Panhandling Committee, be requested to submit a report to the City by 2002 June which provides an update and assessment of the Panhandling Meter Initiative for the period covering 2001 March to 2002 February.
3. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Joe Dobson, Executive Director, Heights Merchants Association, 102 - 4011 Hastings Street, Burnaby, BC. V5C 2J1.

REPORT

The Community Issues and Social Planning Committee, at its meeting held on 2001 September 26, received and adopted the attached report to provide an assessment of the Panhandling Meter Initiative in Burnaby Heights.

Respectfully submitted,

: COPY - CITY MANAGER
- DIRECTOR ENGINEERING
- DIRECTOR FINANCE
- DIR. PLNG. & BLDG.
- DIR. PARKS, REC. & CULT. SERV.
- CHIEF BUILDING INSPECTOR
- OFFICER-IN-CHARGE, R.C.M.P.
- CITY SOLICITOR

Councillor D. Johnston
Chair

Councillor N. Harris
Vice Chair

TO: CHAIR & MEMBERS
COMMUNITY ISSUES AND SOCIAL
PLANNING COMMITTEE
2001 September 17

FROM: DIRECTOR PLANNING AND BUILDING
Our File: 17.934

SUBJECT: BURNABY HEIGHTS PANHANDLING METER INITIATIVE

PURPOSE: To provide an assessment of the panhandling meter initiative in Burnaby Heights.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **THAT** Council be asked to approve the extension of the pilot Burnaby Heights Panhandling Meter Initiative until mid-2002, at which time staff will submit a further report with recommendations regarding future City support for the initiative.
2. **THAT**, to assist with the aforementioned future staff report, the Heights Merchants Association, on behalf of the Heights Panhandling Committee, be requested to submit a report to the City by 2002 June which provides an update and assessment of the Panhandling Meter Initiative for the period covering 2001 March to 2002 February.
3. **THAT** a copy of this report be sent to Joe Dobson, Executive Director, Heights Merchants Association, 102 - 4011 Hastings Street, Burnaby, BC, V5C 2J1.

REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

At its meeting of 1999 May 26, the Community Issues & Social Planning Committee (CISPC) received a delegation from the Heights Panhandling Committee (a group consisting of the Heights Merchants Association, Business Improvement Association, Hastings-Brentwood Community Policing Advisory Committee, and Gilmore Community Council). The speakers expressed concern about panhandling activities in Burnaby Heights. They noted that they had launched a public awareness campaign, encouraging people frequenting Burnaby Heights to refrain from giving money to panhandlers, but to contribute to a charity of their choice instead. They asked the City to support their efforts in two ways:

- 1) undertake preparation of a comprehensive social plan for Burnaby which, with respect to panhandling concerns, could identify services and strategies to help address the underlying social problems that cause people to panhandle (e.g., poverty, addiction, mental health issues); and
- 2) support implementation of a panhandling meter initiative, similar to one undertaken in the City of Kamloops, whereby a) members of the public would be asked to give loose change to specially designated "panhandling meters," rather than to panhandlers, and b) the collected monies would be distributed to appropriate charitable organizations.

Notwithstanding the potential value of a social plan, the CISPC concluded that such a project would be too resource-intensive for the City to undertake at present. The Committee did, however, recommend that Council endorse the second approach proposed by the Heights Panhandling Committee: namely, support for a panhandling meter initiative. Council adopted the recommendation at its meeting of 2000 October 04.

The Burnaby Heights Panhandling Meter Initiative involved the following components:

- a) the Engineering Department pursuing donation of two parking meters to be converted for use as "panhandling meters";
- b) the Engineering Department installing and assuming responsibility for routine maintenance of the meters;
- c) the Heights Merchants Association (HMA) developing an operational plan, which would propose agencies to receive funds from the initiative and specify protocols for collection, deposit, and disbursement of funds;
- d) the HMA assuming responsibility for ongoing operation of the meter initiative; and
- e) the City and HMA jointly monitoring the effectiveness of the initiative.

In accordance with point (e) above, and acting on behalf of the Heights Panhandling Committee, the HMA conducted an evaluation of the Panhandling Meter Initiative, which it submitted to the City in 2001 March. This report conveys a summary of the HMA evaluation, offers a staff assessment, and provides recommendations concerning future City support for the initiative.

2.0 HMA EVALUATION

As noted, the HMA submitted its evaluation of the Panhandling Meter Initiative in 2001 March. The evaluation consisted of a financial summary; a review of the collection, deposit, and disbursement methods; an overview of the initiative's role in raising funds and increasing public awareness of panhandling; and recommendations regarding continuation of the initiative. Key points covered in the evaluation were as follows:

- Two panhandling meters were installed in Burnaby Heights in 2000 January (one on the north side and one on the south side of the 4100 block of Hastings Street).
- In its first 13 months of operation, the panhandling meters generated a total of \$144. The funds were distributed equally amongst three Burnaby non-profit organizations: Burnaby Family Life Institute, Burnaby Information & Community Services Society, and the Boys and Girls Club's Odyssey 1 Program.
- A volunteer from the Hastings-Brentwood Community Policing Office empties the meters on a bi-weekly basis, depositing the funds into a bank account specifically established for that purpose.

- The number of regular panhandlers decreased from a peak of six in 1999 March to two in 2001 March. The Heights Panhandling Committee believes that the meters, and the group's public education efforts, contributed to the decline in panhandling activity in Burnaby Heights.
- In concluding the evaluation, the Heights Panhandling Committee contended that the panhandling meter initiative has been a success and recommended that the meters remain in place, subject to a possible further review in the spring of 2002.

3.0 DISCUSSION

In recommending that the City assist the HMA with the Panhandling Meter Initiative, the CISPC's 1999 October report to Council noted that the meters would not likely be a significant deterrent to panhandlers and would not likely attract substantial donations. The report also noted that, even if the initiative helped reduce panhandling activity in Burnaby Heights, 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 social problems that lead people to panhandle?

Notwithstanding these cautions, the report concluded that, provided expectations were realistic, a panhandling meter initiative could have several potential outcomes:

- 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, as had been instituted in Vancouver and Winnipeg;
- it would give the public a socially responsible alternative to giving money directly to panhandlers; and
- 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.

It is believed that, through the panhandling meter initiative, the first four outcomes have been realized. Specifically, the initiative has provided the City with an opportunity to work with the HMA; it has required minimal City investment (e.g., the meters were donated by the company supplying the City's parking meters); it has proved more prudent and positive than panhandling bylaws (e.g., Winnipeg and Vancouver recently scrapped their panhandling bylaws when it became apparent that the bylaws would not withstand legal challenges); and it has provided the public with an alternative to giving money directly to panhandlers.

Efforts to reach the final outcome (i.e., generation of revenues) have fallen far short, however. As the HMA evaluation revealed, the initiative only raised a total of \$144 (\$72.00 per meter) in its first 13 months of operation. This figure equates to a \$48 share for each of the three agencies receiving the funds, and an average donation rate of 36¢ per day in Burnaby Heights (or 18¢ per meter). To

further put the figure in context, the nine "spare change meters" in the City of Vancouver yielded \$3557 in 2000 (\$395 per meter).

Staff discussed the question of revenue generation from the meters with representatives of the HMA, Heights Panhandling Committee, and Hastings-Brentwood Community Policing Office. While acknowledging that the revenues were modest, these contacts were adamant that the key purpose of the meters was educational, and that generation of funds was a welcome, but secondary function. The contacts also indicated that the agencies participating in the initiative were appreciative of the funds - funds they would otherwise not have received.

With respect to the future of the initiative, contacts from Burnaby Heights rejected a staff suggestion that retention of the meters be tied to a target figure for future collections (e.g., \$500 per year). The contacts contended that, in conjunction with the public education and awareness campaign, the meters helped to reduce the incidence of panhandling in Burnaby Heights. The contacts further noted that, should panhandling increase in the Heights in the future, the meters could have additional utility as awareness-raising tools.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has provided a review of the pilot phase of the Burnaby Heights Panhandling Meter Initiative - both through a summary of the HMA evaluation and a staff assessment. The review has revealed that, on the positive side, the initiative has provided the City with an opportunity to work with the HMA; it has required minimal City investment; it has proved more prudent and positive than panhandling bylaws; and it has provided the public with an alternative to giving money directly to panhandlers. On the negative side, the review has revealed that the meters only generated \$144 in their initial 13 months of operation. The meters clearly have not been chosen as a vehicle for charitable giving by the public. Also, their revenues have been too small to provide tangible help for agencies that could make a difference in the lives of panhandlers or others with similar underlying social problems.

While acknowledging that revenues have been limited, contacts from Burnaby Heights strongly favour retention of the meters. Their rationale is threefold: 1) the meters complement other awareness-raising efforts in the area concerning panhandling, 2) the meters are already in place and only involve negligible costs to the City, and 3) the meters could have increased utility in the future should panhandling activity rise in the area.

Given the foregoing, it is recommended that Council be asked to approve the extension of the pilot Burnaby Heights Panhandling Meter Initiative until mid-2002, at which time staff will submit a further report with recommendations regarding future City support for the initiative. Further, to assist with preparation of the future staff report, it is recommended that the Heights Merchants Association, on behalf of the Heights Panhandling Committee, be asked to submit its own update and assessment of the initiative for the period covering 2001 March to 2002 February. The HMA indicated its willingness to prepare such a report in its 2001 March submission on the initiative. Lastly, it is recommended that a copy of this report be sent to the Executive Director of the Heights Merchants Association.

Prior to submission of the 2002 report, if any pertinent developments occur regarding panhandling in Burnaby Heights generally, or the Panhandling Meter Initiative specifically, staff will apprise the CISPC as appropriate.

B. Belhouse
for J.S. Belhouse, Director
PLANNING AND BUILDING

JF\sla

cc: City Manager
Director Engineering
Director Parks, Recreation & Cultural Services
OIC RCMP
City Solicitor
Director Finance

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