Blending the Hammer and the Heart: The Role of Bylaw in Community Safety

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Penticton

Penticton: in the **Southern Okanagan of B.C** with approximately **37,000 people**

- Tourist town: well known for its **lakes**, **wineries** and **summer climate**
- Between two lakes and two mountains – **limited in growth potential**
- Past few years: increased development and growth
- Rural community designation

As of 2023 Point-in-Time Count: **166 unhoused reside**

Safe & Resilient

Enhance and protect the safety of all residents and visitors to Penticton.

Livable & Accessible

Proactively plan for deliberate growth; focused on an inclusive, healthy, safe and desirable place to live.
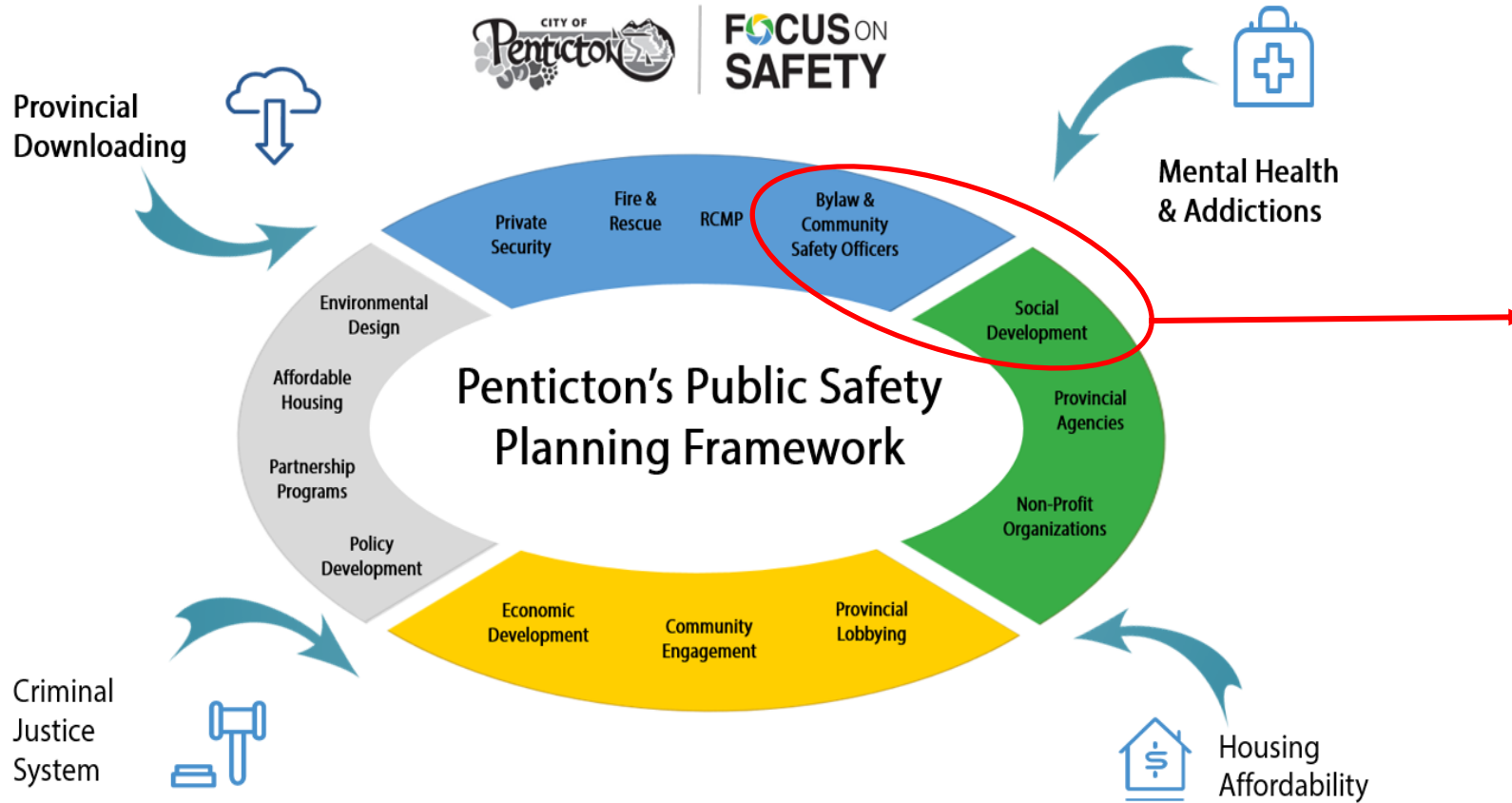
Vibrant & Connected

Support vibrant and diverse activities creating opportunities for connection in community.

Organizational Excellence

Support a culture of service excellence built on good governance, leadership and sound financial decisions.

Public Safety Framework

- To address both **Community Safety** and **Well-Being**

- To help **coordinate** where others play a role

Social Development Framework

- To guide the actions of the **Social Development Department**

- A structured approach to **organizing** and **coordinating efforts** to address complex social issues such as poverty, homelessness, and inequality

- How we work and support the **social sector**

City of Penticton

Towards A Comprehensive Social Framework for the City of Penticton

Key Drivers of Adverse Community Safety and Wellbeing

→ Lack of affordable housing

→ Poverty and economic insecurity

→ Systemic racism and discrimination

→ Unemployment and underemployment

→ Limited access to healthcare services

→ Mental health and substance use

→ Domestic violence and family breakdown

→ Overlapping concerns of health and safety

→ Policy decisions related to social infrastructure

→ Natural disasters and climate change

→ Cultural attitudes and beliefs poverty homelessness, adverse mental health

What role does a municipal government play in responding to these issues?

Who is responsible?

Federal Government	Provincial Government	Local Government
• mail • telephones • taxes • criminal law • money • foreign affairs • banking • national defence • shipping • employment insurance • railways • Aboriginal lands and rights • pipelines	• education • health care • road regulations	• parks • parking • libraries • roadways • local police • local land use • fire protection • public transportation • community water systems

The review identified that:

➤ **Provincial downloading** is stressing our systems

➤ Increased **mental health issues / toxic drug crisis**

➤ There has been a lack of response from **criminal justice system**

➤ Increased **cost of housing** is a major concern short / long term
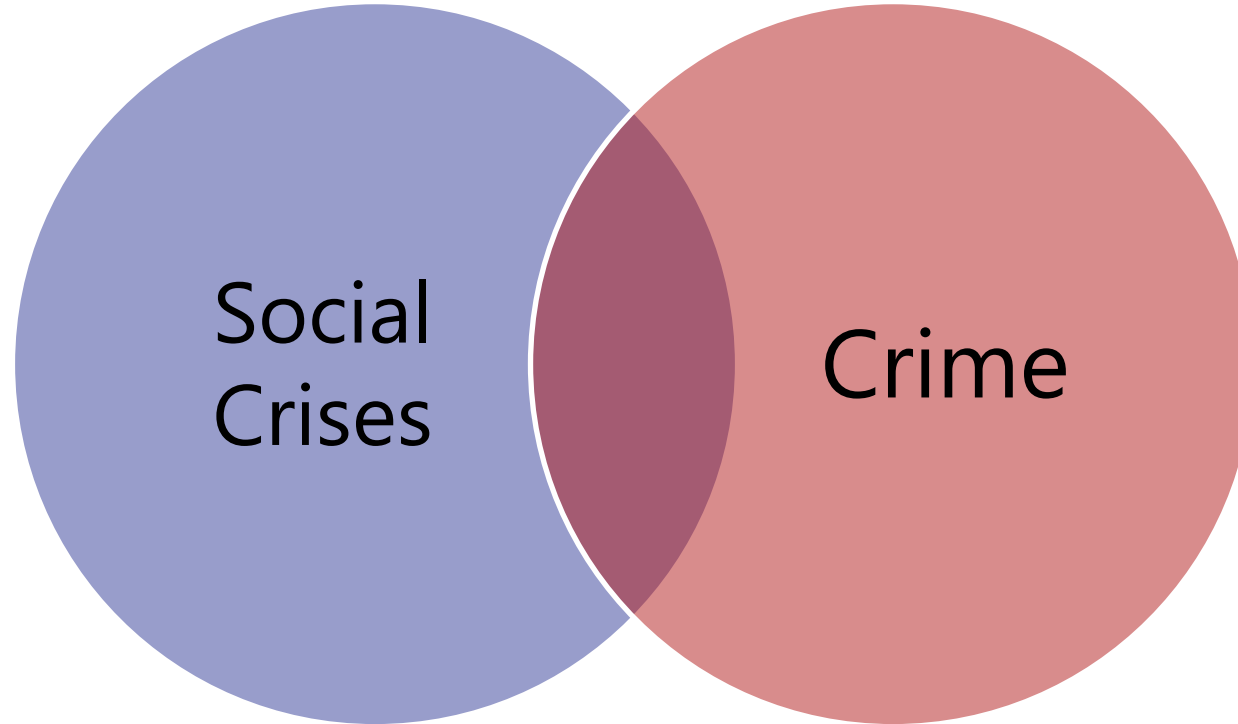
Approaches

Current Model

Prevention → Early Intervention → Emergency Response

Ideal Model

Prevention → Early Intervention → Emergency Response

Social Development & Community Safety

Social Development: Overlapping social crises that need to be met with a **public health response**

Social Crises

Crime

Community Safety: Municipality has invested heavily into **emergency response**

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Community Safety Officer Program

- Officially branded at the start of 2019 with 2 Bylaw Officers that were re-branded **Community Safety Officers**

- The intent is to provide a dedicated and connected approach to support the unhoused population as well as help support our other stakeholders within the community

- Predictability, accountability, and consistency

- At this time, we had **1 Supportive Housing complex** and **1 Temporary Shelter**
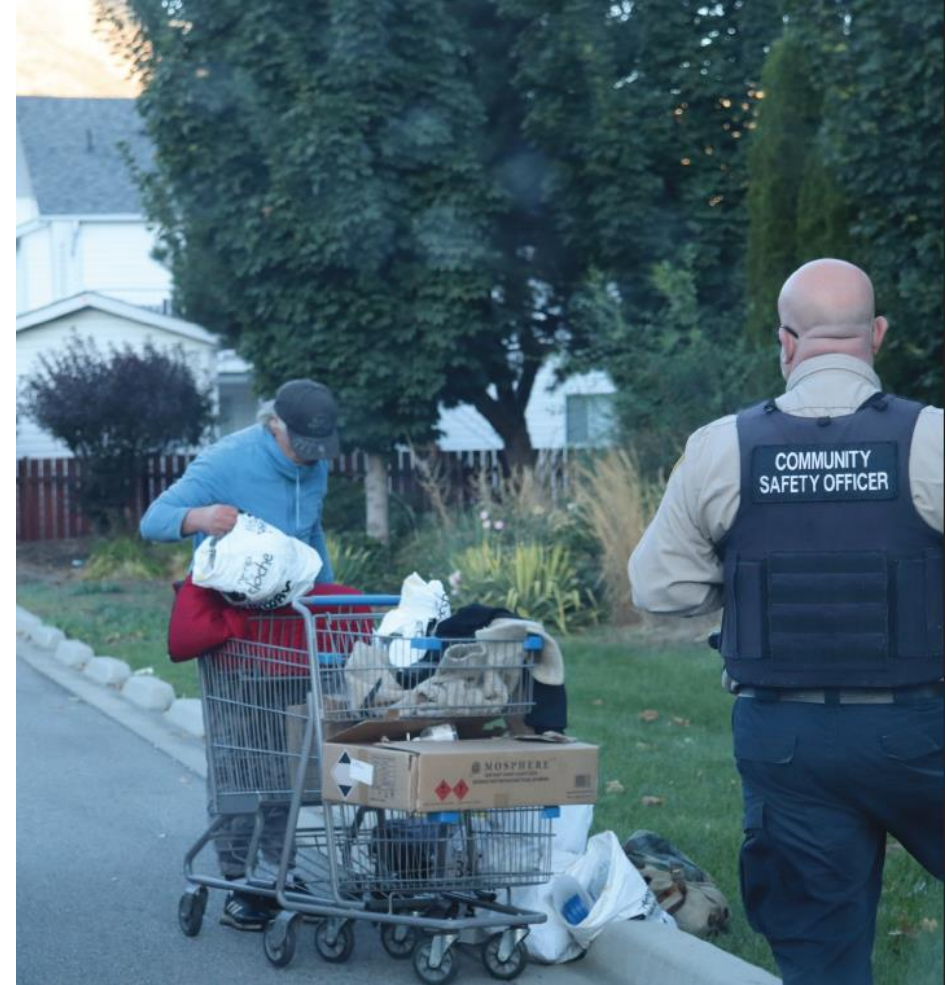
- Getting to know the **unhoused population**
- One year into the program started to get to know **other frontline staff** from the community and working collaboratively
  - Outreach workers, case workers, probation, shelter staff, hospital staff
  - Partnering together **built trust** amongst unhoused people

Relationship with RCMP

RCMP was getting overrun with calls for social nuisance

Reduced 911 Calls

- Calls directed to CSO

Partnership

- Established healthy working relationship with RCMP

Emerging Encampments

Summer 2020

- Approximately **60 people** in a local forested park and 30 in the City
- Quickly emerged in response to desire to not see unhoused folks downtown

Challenges

- 2 CSOs were working **night shift**
- **Dangerous conditions** – other frontline staff also tending to the site: RCMP on occasion and outreach workers
- Fires, explosions, sexual assault
- Costs

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2021

- **100 unhoused folks dispersed** throughout community
- Some additional shelter space
- Kelowna at the time looking at a **designated shelter space** – some pressure at Penticton to do the same

Solidified Model

- **Wake up** unhoused folks
- **Wellness checks**

Community Safety Officer Program

- 2023 came out with the **Safe Public Places Bylaw**
- Sets clear expectations for the use of and **behaviours in public spaces** (shopping malls, grocery stores, schools, private but public access)
    - Substance use, panhandling, obstruction, loiter, etc
- Unique in that there is **no associated "fine" process**
- It is intended for officers to **make contact with the individual**, provide education, resources, and/or options as to where they can go for those activities
- Gives officers an opportunity to **connect to individuals** as well as help support businesses

Community Safety Officer Program- Present

- 8 Full time CSO's and 1 full time Youth CSO
- Community Safety Officer Supervisor
- Coverage 7 days a week, 06:00-23:00
- Encampments, referrals, substance use, wellness checks, first aid, referrals, community engagement, managing public spaces, safety, information sharing (court dates, shelter spaces, incidents)

Collaborative Approach
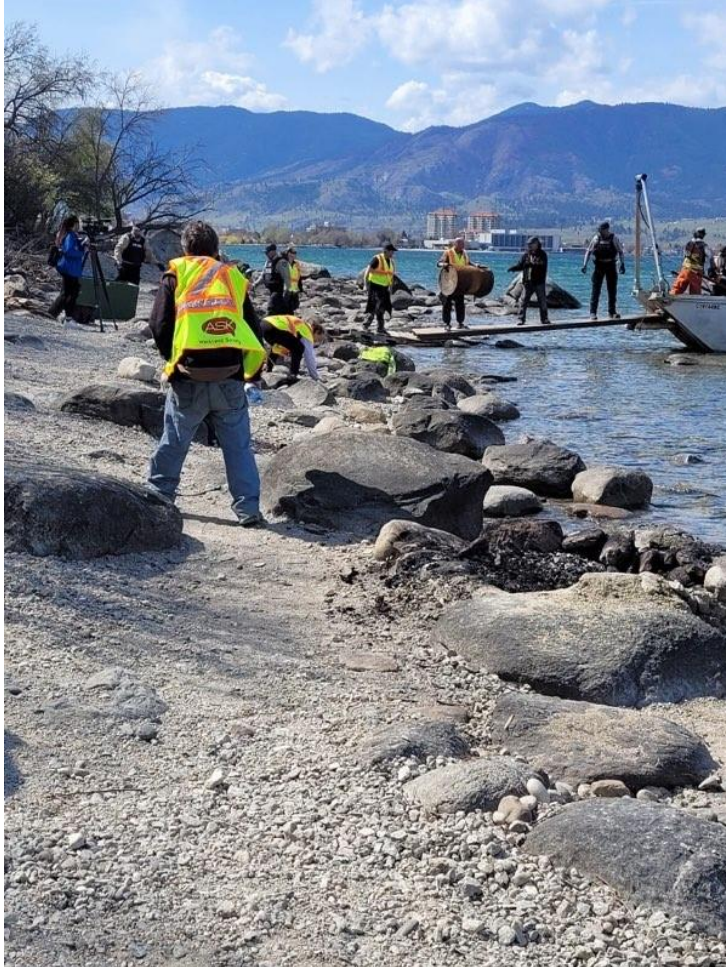
Learnings

- Learnt more about **drug-use patterns** and behaviours
- Transformed practices

Flexibility

- Ie. Earlier start time imposed since to accommodate **wellness checks** first thing in the morning

Partnership

- Working with **other resources**: ie. peers, health services
- Attending community outreach **coordination meetings**

Balance

Balancing the **overall public safety** and what level of **compliance** is reasonable

Build accountability and trust

Evidence-based data

Balancing emergency needs with prevention approaches

Being creative with our approach

Carving out each other's roles

Evolution

Starting off... The community was unsure of us

Balancing the **overall public safety** and what level of **compliance** is reasonable

Now established, what's the next evolution of the program?

Learnings
Frequently checking in with **the sector** to locate people
Took time to built trust with the community: balancing **compassion** and **compliance**

Biggest asset: knowing all the information on the people
- Previous history, drug choice
- Where they are located
- To be a resource for other agencies

Prevention and Intervention

- Getting to know **the lived experience stories** of most of unhoused folks in Penticton has shown that many:
  - Experienced homelessness for the first time as a **youth**
  - Had a negative experience with the **child welfare system**
  - **Had little supports as a youth**
- **Youth Community Safety Officer** & **Peer Support Worker**
  - Working with Foundry Penticton
  - Early identification and **prevention in schools** and popular youth spots

Thank you.

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