

Councillor's Report for November 14, 2017
Beverley Tripp

On Friday, November 3rd I attended a community meeting at the Gospel Chapel, which well over 60 Grand Forks residents attended. The topic of "homelessness" has, by now, touched virtually everyone in the community in some way or form. As I see it, the term, "homelessness" doesn't even remotely describe the troubling issue that is gripping our community, and indeed, most others nation-wide. It, along with those experiencing housing change, poverty, disenfranchisement from society, increased criminal activity, drug dealing/drug addiction, and mental health issues more adequately encompasses what is happening here. But it's a catchall phrase that most understand so I will use it in this report, even though I realize it's far too limiting a term.

I believe that many of the residents who showed up for the community meeting had concerns stemming from their personal interactions and/or connection to any, or perhaps all – of the above-named issues, and were hoping to get some answers for the frustration and helplessness that they feel over the City's seeming lack of response to the issue. It became evident very early on in the meeting that there was an extreme divide among those present over philosophical ideologies concerning how to deal with this. On one side are those who have been targets of victimization through crime, vandalism and intimidation. They are frustrated, angry, and afraid, and rightly so, because they have been violated and there seems to be no recourse for the crimes committed against them. Last week, I received an email from one resident who expressed her concern that the message from the community meeting was that those law-abiding citizens who have been victimized were "stupid to have left lawn ornaments in place, bicycles unchained, lawn tractors in view, car windows open and that you can only walk at night with a body guard." Those good folks who make up the fabric of our community need to be reassured that the crimes against them are being addressed and that something is being done to bring back law and order! On the other side are those working professionally with, or volunteering with the "homeless." Their philosophy embraces an empathetic ethic where the impression is given that compassion minimizes measures of justice and retribution. As I see it, both are necessary if we are to be successful in dealing with this issue in our community. People do not live "on an island;" they live in community and everything they do affects others. In other words, we are neighbors. Our legal system is [supposedly] set up to bring justice to those who break the law and protect the rest of society from those bad behaviors. Yet much about our society is broken and many of our neighbors end up being the unfortunate victims of that brokenness. I believe in an integrated model that would address both the lawlessness issue and also offer the practical solutions that bring about lasting change leading to our neighbors becoming contributing members of society.

In terms of information sharing at the meeting, I found it was encouraging to hear from groups like Citizens On Patrol, who spoke about what they are doing to help be extra sets of "eyes and ears," looking out for potential criminal activity around town. This group is desperately looking for more volunteers to increase week-end patrols. They meet every third Thursday at 7 pm. at Community Futures. It was also suggested that getting to know your neighbors and putting Neighborhood Watch programs in place could be effective in specific neighborhoods; Lorraine Dyck offered to assist with setting these up. I shared that Council is working on getting a meeting with the Nelson RCMP detachment to speak with them about the need to beef up policing services in our area. On the addictions/recovery side, a lot was shared about which agencies and services are working in the Boundary region, and what opportunities and options are available for those experiencing mental health or addiction issues. Dara Sutton, Executive Director for BWC, also shared extensively about Housing First, an intervention initiative to end homelessness, and a step by step plan to work up a strategic plan for our area.

Since then, I have had a number of meetings and conversations with members of the community about this issue. I am looking forward to attending the Boundary Interagency Group meeting on Tuesday,

November 14th as an appointed representative from the City, and I will continue to be learning, engaging, networking, and doing all I can to help work toward positive solutions to this very complex issue.

Several months ago when the Whispers of Hope issue arose with Council, I asked that a Town Hall meeting be organized by the City. I felt that many people in the community who would greatly benefit from one. Having engaged with more residents since then I see that the appetite for one is even greater, so I will be bringing a motion forward at the November 14th Regular Meeting for a Town Hall meeting to take place.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverley Tripp