



PARTNERING FOR SUCCESS PROGRAM

How to Deal with *Rising Whitehorse Property Crime Concerns*

Introduction:

The Whitehorse Chamber of Commerce *Partnering for Success* is an initiative created to strengthen economic growth, prosperity and cooperation throughout the territory. This private-sector-driven initiative exists to encourage and support our business community, industry associations, governments, and First Nations to work together, address common challenges, and find common solutions for all Yukon residents.

As a small jurisdiction, it is imperative that we come together and identify the opportunities and actions that will propel our economy forward – for our generation and for our children. The mandate of *Partnering for Success* is that it acts as a conduit for cooperation to foster economic prosperity for Yukon.

The Challenge

How to Deal with *Rising Whitehorse Property Crime Concerns*, particularly in the Downtown core.

The Goal

The WCC aims to identify potential initiatives and solutions to mitigate property crime for Whitehorse businesses. We aim to develop a collective approach to creating a safer and secure community for all of Whitehorse.

What We Heard

The What We Heard report results from a stakeholder engagement on the *Rising Whitehorse Property Crime Concerns* within the Business Community.

Our engagement invited key business stakeholders to seek input on specific stories and concerns relative to property crime and actionable recommended solutions.

Engagement Questions

During the engagement, participants were asked for input on the following information:

- Specific stories and concerns relative to their business
- Financial losses caused by property crime
- Recommended solutions to alleviate property crime



Overall impressions

Below summarizes some of the overall feedback that was collected throughout the engagement.

Over the past several months, there has been a wave of crime throughout the City of Whitehorse. Small businesses have been particularly hard-hit and have faced break-ins, theft, property crime, and vandalism. In some cases, businesses have been targeted multiple times and have faced numerous break-ins. Small businesses that are already suffering are discouraged and want to see increased action to stop criminal activity and ensure that they can operate their businesses safely.

Small businesses are concerned about their property. Some businesses are looking to relocate, and some are even considering closing altogether. There seemed to be a consensus that things are going in the wrong direction. The general condition of the downtown is deteriorating, both appearance-wise and safety-wise. Challenging situations on the street and inside stores are increasing and becoming potentially more dangerous. Jason Gedron from Taku Sports Group reported a shoplifter pulling a knife in one instance.

Reporting:

At the same time, the number of incidents not being reported to the RCMP is increasing due to the time and effort involved, the sometimes slow response, and the results of the effort to do so. Mike Pemberton from Ericko Holdings Ltd. spoke about the need to report all incidents so that they show up in the annual statistics, which impacts the attention being paid to the problem by the RCMP along with the ability to charge repeat offenders. Jason Gedron from Taku Sports Group raised the possibility of a more streamlined method for recording and reporting these incidents without the time investment presently required. There is a general agreement on that point.

Partnerships:

The connection between drug use, mental illness, poverty and lack of housing was also highlighted. As such, the participants recommend that the Chamber should monitor and provide input on the *Safe at Home* program and other ongoing harm reduction strategies, to become more aware of what's going on behind the scenes and possibly lobby the Government of Yukon for increased funding and additional efforts that may have a positive spillover effect towards our areas of most significant concern.

Bylaw:

The role the City of Whitehorse should be playing was also discussed in terms of general maintenance, particularly of their property on the street and how they communicate issues to partner organizations like RCMP and or Safety officers.



Bylaws should expand their role in working with businesses to ensure the Maintenance Bylaw is met. When Bylaw officers are on the street writing parking tickets, they should play a strategic role as “boots on the ground” and be helpful eyes to report issues to RCMP or new Safety officers, depending on the situation.

Planning:

These downtown issues are not separate from the planning, and there should be coordination within the City of Whitehorse. There should be a collective vision that considers the business owners and operators, and we must look at ways to improve our downtown and keep it animated and vibrant in the face of developments occurring on the Alaska Highway and elsewhere. There are many ways to do this and many examples of what other communities have done in similar situations.

Safety Officers and Hot Line:

There was also discussion about the need for "boots on the ground," sometimes known as "Community Policing." There was a general acknowledgement that the RCMP have their hands full and need more resources and more staff to deal with the higher priority issues and still have available resources to address the types of problems that we're discussing. The government should ensure that businesses have the safety and security they need to operate and that the RCMP has the resources they need to combat crime. A reporting hotline was discussed with the Whitehorse Emergency Shelter (WES) Safety Plan. It should be expanded to prevent 911 from getting bogged down with issues where parties need a Safety officer to provide support.

Trespassing Act:

The possibility of the Trespass act and, Anti-Loitering and Aggressive Panhandling Bylaws was also discussed. Many repeat shoplifter offenders are known to the retailers but cannot easily be denied entry. The stores are thus forced to use staff resources to shadow them. Also, the lack of enforcement of existing laws regarding Public Drinking by the RCMP was a concern. We should become more familiar with some of the more successful efforts in other jurisdictions, both Canada and abroad.

Future:

It was also discussed that the Chamber should consider creating a new committee that would focus on practical, achievable efforts towards improving the overall condition of our downtown, similar to the work previously done by *Main Street Yukon*, naming it *Downtown Maintenance & Safety Committee*. Chris Sorg, the Past President of the *Main Street Yukon*, has volunteered to spearhead this effort to coordinate a strategy with all the various players, including the City of Whitehorse and any businesses willing to participate and support the effort.



We look forward to working with our partners to action these key items to support our local business community and the Whitehorse community as a whole.