

Cranbrook's Public Safety Evolution

November 24, 2025

Before and After Summary: Fragmented Efforts to Forward Thinking Approach

Cranbrook's approach to public safety was once largely reactive. The City had minimal resources dedicated to addressing complex social issues like homelessness, addiction, and mental health. The Bylaw department consisted of 2 officers, primarily focused on minor infractions. Coordination between city departments, RCMP, and social service agencies was limited, often resulting in delayed or disjointed responses to emerging community concerns.

Over the past few years, BC Housing and numerous local non-profits have worked closely with the City to address the needs of vulnerable residents and reduce visible homelessness—efforts that have shown real success. In 2021, camps like the 20 tents behind McDonald's on the berm along Ridgeview Road often caused conflicts with businesses, customers, and visitors, other encampments near creeks and schools were highly visible and concerning to parents and residents nearby. Today those highly visible and problematic urban encampments are no longer in high visibility and busy areas. This has reduced conflicts in the community, lowered emergency response needs, and saved taxpayers money, showing the results that come when organizations work together.

Today, Cranbrook's public safety strategy reflects a significant cultural shift. The City has moved from isolated, reactive efforts to a cohesive, proactive model that balances enforcement with empathy. Bylaw and RCMP teams now work side-by-side, engaging with the community through visible patrols and coordinated outreach. Technology like drones and park cameras enhances monitoring, while new policies provide the framework to manage public spaces responsibly.

Social issues are no longer viewed as isolated problems but as shared challenges requiring multi-sector solutions. The City's leadership in fostering collaboration and innovation has inspired a more resilient and responsive social network. Cranbrook is now recognized across the Province for its forward-thinking approach to public safety—one that prioritizes both compassion and accountability.

The Changes: Building a Coordinated and Compassionate Response

Recognizing the need for a more strategic approach, Cranbrook initiated a series of social-focused public safety improvements:

Creation of Key Roles

Social Development Coordinator

The creation of this position was in response to advocacy across sectors, a recognition of the changes in the social fabric of the community, and a genuine desire by the City and the Regional District of East Kootenay (RDEK), with both funding this new role, to align existing non-profit organizations, community advocates, faith-based organizations, Indigenous organizations, and the Provincial and Federal Government in identifying and addressing the issues and challenges being experienced by Cranbrook's citizens. This role is to bridge gaps between enforcement and outreach, ensuring vulnerable populations receive support.

Although the homelessness is more prevalent and visible in Cranbrook and not in the smaller surrounding communities in the region, many of the vulnerable citizens of the smaller communities in the region come to Cranbrook as the service center to access the services they need, as their home smaller communities lack these services, most don't return to their home communities. The opioid addiction, mental health, poverty, homelessness issue is a regional issue affecting the regional population in all RDEK communities; however, it is impacting the City of Cranbrook as the vulnerable population comes to Cranbrook for the social, legal and healthcare Provincial services in the City.

Local partners took early action to support both people experiencing homelessness and surrounding neighbourhoods ahead of the opening of BC Housing's new 'Step Beyond' shelter on 16th Avenue N. Drawing from the experience of other communities where shelters have opened, local partners are taking early action to ensure the success of 'Step Beyond' for people and the surrounding community.

The working group includes BC Housing, Cranbrook Community Connections Society of Southeast BC (CCS), other local service providers, indigenous partners, Interior Health, local police, firefighters, and the City of Cranbrook. The group focuses on identifying and responding to issues quickly, strengthening partnerships, and supporting the safety and wellbeing of the entire community. By working together through a coordinated approach, these partners are working to ensure community safety and support remain top priorities.

RCMP Community Engagement Coordinator

This newly established position works as a liaison between RCMP and the community to identify and implement crime prevention & crime reduction strategies as well as leads the Cranbrook RCMP volunteer program. To date, the Community Engagement Coordinator has increased Cranbrook RCMP's external communication and crime prevention education through its Facebook page, launched [Project 529](#) (a bike theft prevention and recovery tool) and delivered several crime reduction presentations to businesses within the community.

RCMP Watch Clerk Positions x 4

These new administrative professional positions were added to take on the administrative workload in the office from frontline RCMP officers, to keep police on the road and serving the community.

RCMP Records Lead Position

This position conducts critical quality assurance on police files, ensuring they are compliant with uniform crime reporting standards, resulting in improved case files for prosecution.

BC RCMP Auxiliary Program

This Auxiliary Program was relaunched in 2024 and it strengthens community and police partnerships by providing highly trained volunteers with peace officer status the opportunity to perform a variety of activities that enhance community policing and crime prevention initiatives. Auxiliary Program volunteers (once trained), alongside Cranbrook RCMP members, will help to provide greater community visibility and support crime reduction education & initiatives specific to our community needs.

New Bylaws

The city created 2 new Bylaws to better manage encampments and ensure public space safety.

- In 2023, Cranbrook City Council adopted the no camping bylaw as the most appropriate measure for managing issues related to a growing unhoused population. This bylaw has proven to be an effective strategy for managing encampments and tackling temporary shelters being erected in inappropriate areas of the community.
- In June 2025, Council adopted the Public Places Bylaw which outlines expected standards of behaviour in public areas. It supports the use of public spaces for everyone by addressing disruptive behaviours like public intoxication, fighting, graffiti, and littering. This bylaw also empowers Bylaw Services and the Cranbrook RCMP Detachment to act more effectively when problems do arise.

Expansion and modernization of Bylaw Services

A bylaw officer position was added to provide more resources to address increasing requests for community safety resources, while still maintaining levels of service for other traditional bylaw functions.

The team was then integrated with RCMP operations, enabling joint patrols and provide a more visible presence and community engagement due to major new challenges to our City with drug use, homelessness, mental health issues, crime and encampments.

Introduced Drone Program

Created a policy and program for the use of drones that allows for remote observation and monitoring of reported and known bylaw issues for sites that are difficult or risky to access. This is focused on protection of City property and public spaces by gathering objective data and evidence to enforce bylaws.

Bike Patrol Program

The City has created a Bike Patrol program for its Bylaw Officers allowing an addition method for active and visible patrols, especially in the Downtown area. This new service provides a more public and visible presence for our Bylaw team and provides additional opportunities for engagement and interaction with the public.

Collaborative Meetings

Regular coordination between Fire, RCMP, Bylaw, and social agencies began, monitoring outdoor sheltering sites, respond to community calls, support outreach, and provide pathways to services.

In April 2024, members of the Cranbrook RCMP detachment and City Bylaw staff met with representatives from the business community in the first Business Engagement Meeting. The Business Engagement Meetings will take place regularly to encourage open dialogue across the business community with the RCMP and help identify issues and develop effective responses to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder and fear of crime. This is renewed in 2025.

Mayor's Task Force

The Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, Community Safety & Wellbeing was created in 2023 to bring together the various government agencies, non-profit groups, and others from health care to enforcement to social services to housing, to better coordinate their services and work together for improving the situation in Cranbrook. The Task Force also hosted two townhall information sessions around the issues of homelessness and other social issues in Cranbrook for

the public in June 2024. The Task Force presented its final report to Council in November 2024 - <https://cranbrook.ca/our-city/mayor-and-council/committees/mayors-task-force-on-homelessness/>.

The final report also shares details on how and why the Task Force on Homelessness was formed and highlights the many challenges many sectors of Cranbrook are facing in relation to social issues.

Advocacy

Participated in poverty reduction gatherings regionally and advocated for housing and community safety at UBCM and suggested to Provincial leaders to review non-violent repeat offender laws.

In January 2024, Council passed a resolution to send an invoice to the province for costs incurred for managing sites where those living rough are staying. The motion put forward by Councillor Wes Graham highlighted that the province, through BC Housing, is responsible for providing housing, however, municipalities like Cranbrook are incurring downloaded costs to manage and clean up these sites, especially through Bylaw Services, and Fire and Emergency Services. The expenses were submitted to the various provincial Ministry staff but were unsuccessful in receiving any support.

At the political level over the past two years, members of Council and the CAO have met with provincial officials at the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) conference in Victoria in September 2025, and in Vancouver in 2024 to discuss the need for more resources and support for crime prevention in Cranbrook.

City representatives met with the Honourable Terry Yung, Minister of State for Community Safety and Integrated Services, and senior officials from the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General to advocate for stronger measures addressing repeat offenders and their impacts on local residents and businesses.

In a separate meeting with the Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs, discussions focused on homelessness, substance use, and mental health, emphasizing the lack of coordination among provincial agencies and service providers.

At the same conference in Vancouver in 2024, City representatives met with Attorney General Niki Sharma and the Director of Police Services, Glen Lewis, where the City highlighted the rise in property crime linked to drug abuse and mental health issues. Representatives urged the province to review legislation that allows frequent offenders to be quickly released after arrest, emphasizing that the community's tolerance for repeat property crime is reaching a breaking point.

Meetings with senior officials from the Ministries of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, and Mental Health and Addictions in 2024 focused on the increasing number of vulnerable individuals from the East Kootenay region coming to Cranbrook to access social services, healthcare, addictions treatment and court. The City requested provincial support to help offset local costs of providing social services and improved transportation for individuals to return to their smaller home communities in the Kootenays with support.

The response Cranbrook often receives is that the province reviews crime stat data to understand the issues and identify needs for each community. Because of the consistent lack of official community reporting of crime – meaning an official report to RCMP with a file number, not a random post on social media - Cranbrook is not being considered to receive any additional supports from any other levels of government, provincial or federal.

Public Engagement

The city launched a Citizen Survey to identify safety priorities and used the results to guide future planning. Findings from the 2024 Citizen Survey identified homelessness, crime, and safety as Cranbrook's top issues which is why this year's survey had a specific focus on community safety to better understand residents' safety concerns and perceptions. Some of the key findings included:

- 93% feel safe during the day, while 75% feel safe walking downtown
- 23% reported being affected by crime in the past year, and 37% of those affected reported it to police
- 53% support additional funding of police officers, and 25% were undecided
- Top priorities for RCMP include street-level drug activity, property crime, person crime, and homelessness

The survey results provided Council with a clear understanding of community priorities early in the Budget 2026 process, helping ensure decisions about services and spending reflect local input. The data also offers valuable insight to the Cranbrook RCMP as they plan and set policing priorities for the coming years.

Proactive Education

Programs like Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) were introduced to help residents and businesses secure their properties, vehicles, and belongings.

The goal of applied CPTED is to deter crime by designing an environment that positively influences human behavior.

This is intended to be a proactive education and outreach campaign to our business community and residents, by providing best practices, detailed checklists and practical marketing materials

and guidance. This program is not intended to have bylaw staff involved with any criminal behaviour or investigations, or replace day to day activities of our partners at the RCMP. The City will continue to work proactively with business community representatives, such as the Chamber of Commerce, to assist with communications and engagement.

This program will educate property owners and citizens on the basic principles of CPTED, which are:

- Controlling access to properties and facilities
- Teaching citizens and property owners the fundamentals of surveillance
- Identifying territories and securing that area
- Promote scheduled security maintenance

Successful Grant Applications

With the collaborative effort and an application through the coordination of various services under the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, Cranbrook was successful in receiving its first ever grant through Health Canada, announced in July 2025. This grant will support encampment services and fund additional resources thanks to over \$1.3 million from Health Canada and the Government of Canada through the Emergency Treatment Fund. The grant will help launch a new clinical mobile outreach van and support several targeted local initiatives including a mobile drug-checking and outreach unit, naloxone training and education, and expanded peer support services. These services will be delivered by various non-profit and social agencies that are part of the Mayor's Task Force on Homelessness, to reduce overdose fatalities, strengthen local emergency response, and enhance community-wide awareness and support systems.

After the Changes: A Unified, Proactive Community Approach

Cranbrook is becoming known across the province for its community-style model of managing and responding to the complex social issues it faces. Cranbrook has not solved its social issues, but it has changed the narrative around how to address homelessness and how to balance compassion with accountability.
