

HOMELESSNESS: Everyone's Business

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Background on the Downtown BIA

- Established in 1990
- 90 blocks: Central Business District + Downtown South
- 8,000 businesses
- Funded by an annual BIA levy
- Collected by the City from commercial property owners
- Tenants pay approximately 5 cents per square foot
- Governed by an elected Board of Directors
- Staff of five
- Contracted services

Guided by a Strategic Plan

- 5-year strategic plan
- Input from members and key stakeholders
- Board of Directors establish goals based on input
- Committees develop strategies to attain the goals
- Staff responsible for implementation of the strategies
- Board has oversight responsibilities

Focus of the Plan

Seven Key Result Areas:

- Access and Mobility
- Advocacy
- Image and Awareness
- Marketing
- Place Making
- Safety and Security
- Well-Being

Goal: Reduce/Eliminate Homelessness

- Why did this become more of a focus for the DV BIA?
- General public perception of the issue had shifted
- Membership perception of the issue had also shifted

General Public Perception

- In 2005, 4% expressed concerns about visible homelessness downtown
- In 2008, 15% expressed similar concerns

General Public Perception

- In 2005, 55% believed that the state of homelessness downtown had worsened in the past two years
- In 2008, 64% believed that the state of homelessness downtown had worsened in the past two years

Membership Perception

- In 2005, 14% of our members believed that visible homelessness downtown was a concern
- It ranked fourth on the list behind open drug use, crime and panhandling

Membership Perception

- In 2008, 26% of our members believed that visible homelessness downtown was a concern
- It now ranked first on the list

Membership Perception

- In 2006, 59% believed that the state of homelessness downtown had worsened in the past two years
- In 2007, 69% believed that the state of homelessness downtown had worsened in the past two years
- In 2008, the percentage of those members that believed this dropped to 61%

Membership Perception

- The shift not as a result that members believed that the situation had “improved”
- The 8% shift moved to those members who believed that the situation had “stayed the same”
- Regardless of this shift, homelessness still ranked the highest amongst our members of issues that needed to be addressed

Strategies

Advocate for supportive housing and similar initiatives

- Covenant House
- The Gathering Place
- Coast Foundation on Seymour Street
- Dusk to Dawn at St. Paul's Hospital
- Directions on Burrard Street
- Bosman's Hotel Community on Seymour Street

Strategies

Serve on advisory committees

- Directions
- Bosman's Hotel Community
- Streetohome Foundation

Strategies

Provide employment opportunities

- Street Youth Job Action
- United We Can
- Coast Foundation
- Bosman's Hotel Community
- Downtown Ambassadors

Strategies

Support the establishment of the shelters

- Add our voice to the many diverse voices
- Communicate our support publicly and to the media
- Communicate our support to elected officials
- Messaging that underscores the importance that shelters play in reducing visible homelessness and concerns of the public and our membership

Strategies

Inform/engage our members

- E-newsletters, newsletters, speeches and profiled on our web site to increase awareness of the issue
- Highlight our partnerships with Directions, Coast Foundation and Bosman's Hotel Community on our web site
- The list of free food, shelters and other resources for the homeless is on our web site
- Provide opportunities for our members to help

Strategies

Participate in Homelessness Action Week

- Assist in recruiting businesses to participate in Homeless Connect
- Assist in distributing the cards to the homeless regarding Homeless Connect
- Increase the awareness of the issue amongst our members

Strategies

Role of Ambassadors

- Downtown Ambassadors connect with the homeless on a daily basis
- In winter, Downtown Ambassadors offer warm clothing and non-perishable food items
- In summer, Downtown Ambassadors offer bottled water
- Throughout the year, they offer list of free food, shelters and other resources to the homeless

Strategies

Training

- Downtown Ambassadors receive on-going training to better assist the homeless
- Mental health first aid training
- Orientation site visits at Directions
- Plans to do one at the Bosman's Hotel Community

Outcomes

- Less visible homelessness especially when the shelters are operational: down 75%
- Combination of more supportive housing and shelters being made available results in significant drops in aggressive panhandling, open drug use and trespass on private property.

Outcomes

- Aggressive panhandling
 - Monthly average of incidents in Summer of 2008: 300
 - Winter shelters open in early 2009
 - Within a two-month period, incidents per month drop from 280 to 110
 - A reduction of 61%

Outcomes

- Aggressive panhandling
 - During the Summer of 2009, there are 200 less incidents per month compared to the Summer of 2008
 - With the opening of Dunsmuir House in the Fall of 2009 and the reopening of the winter shelters in late 2009, the number of incidents per month fall to below 80

Outcomes

- Aggressive panhandling
 - Bosman's Hotel Community opens in the Summer of 2010
 - Number of incidents per month fall from 65 to 28
 - With the reopening of the winter shelters in late 2010, the number of incidents per month are well below 20
 - A record low of 5 incidents are recorded in January 2011

Outcomes

- Aggressive panhandling
 - With the closure of the winter shelters in Spring of 2011 the number of incidents per month gradually crept up
 - 30 incidents in May
 - A high of 59 in August
 - It dropped back down to 25 in September
 - Comparing the Summer of 2008 to the Summer of 2011, the average number of incidents decreased by 88%

Outcomes

- Open drug use
 - In October 2008, 140 open drug use incidents were recorded
 - This dropped to 51 incidents in February 2009 or a 64% decrease in incidents
 - In August 2009, the number of incidents increase to 200

Outcomes

- Open drug use
 - This increase is short lived and the number of monthly incidents start to fall with the opening of Dunsmuir House and the winter shelters in Fall 2009
 - In January 2010, only 11 incidents are recorded

Outcomes

- Open drug use
 - With the opening of Bosman's Hotel Community in the Summer of 2010 and the winter shelters opening up in late 2010, there are fewer than 10 incidents per month observed
 - Comparing October 2008 to October 2010, there are 97% fewer incidents: 140 versus 4
 - Last month only 6 incidents were observed

Outcomes

- Trespass on private property
 - In January 2009, there were 521 incidents observed
 - The following month when the shelters open, it falls to 497
 - With each passing month the number of incidents drops
 - In July 2009, only 107 incidents are observed.
 - Year-over-year, 190 less incidents or a 64% decrease.

Outcomes

- Trespass on private property
 - By October 2009, the incidents have crept back up to 370
 - The shelters were closed and Dunsmuir House had just opened.
 - By January 2010, however, the number of incidents drop dramatically to 192.
 - Bosman's Hotel Community opens in the Summer of 2010

Outcomes

- Trespass on private property
 - By October 2010, the incidents are down to 114
 - By comparison, in October 2009: 370 incidents were observed
 - In October 2008: 990 incidents were observed
 - In a two-year period, trespass incidents have fallen by 88%

Outcomes

- Trespass on private property
 - This year alone, an average of 53 trespass incidents per month
 - In 2008, the monthly average was 436.

Conclusions

- Don't stand on the sidelines and expect others to solve the problem
- Business organizations such as ours can make a contribution
- It needs to be in the Strategic Plan to be meaningful and sincere
- Shelters and supportive housing make a significant difference to everyone's quality of life
- Homelessness is everyone's business