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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)

Date: 12/16/2021 5:05:01 PM

Subject: Council Memo - Business Roundtable on Property Crime - RTS 14744

Attachments: CMO - Memo to Mayor & Council - Business Roundtable on Property Crime - RTS 14744.pdf

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Dear Mayor and Council,

Attached is a memo outlining the issues and recommendations concerning property crime and theft raised at a Neighbourhood Safety Business Roundtable Memo hosted by the City on December 6, 2021.

The memo details issues that were raised by participants, along with 32 recommendations concerning:

- increased policing, homelessness and mental health supports,
- data, statistics and communications,
- improved street lighting,
- cleanliness and maintenance,
- graffiti,
- proactive measures, and
- partnership, collaboration and advocacy.

And as well, this memo provides a summary of initiatives that are addressing property crime and shoplifting that are underway or recently completed, being led by the City, VPD and the Board of Parks and Recreation.

As this memo has been developed in response to a **Council motion** RTS 14744, it will be made public on Tuesday, December 21, 2021, and will be shared with all of the Roundtable's participants.

Best,  
Paul

**Paul Mochrie** (he/him)  
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City of Vancouver  
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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the x<sup>w</sup>məθk<sup>w</sup>əyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

## MEMORANDUM

December 16, 2021

TO: Mayor and Council

CC: Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager  
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager  
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk  
Lynda Graves, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office  
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC  
Anita Zaenker, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Neil Monckton, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office  
Alvin Singh, Communications Director, Mayor's Office

FROM: Paul Mochrie, City Manager

SUBJECT: Vancouver Business Stakeholder December 6, 2021 Roundtable on Property Crime, Theft, and Violent Shoplifting, Findings and Recommendations

RTS #: 14744

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### A. PURPOSE

In October 2021, Vancouver City Council passed a [motion](#) directing staff to invite community leaders, industry associations, and Business Improvement Associations to participate in a roundtable to share concerns and perspectives on increased property crime, theft, and violent shoplifting in Vancouver.

On December 6, 2021, City staff convened a business stakeholder roundtable, bringing together 41 representatives from the business community across Vancouver and other relevant stakeholders. Organisations represented included Business Improvement Associations (BIAs), Community Policing Centres, the Vancouver Board of Trade, Destination Vancouver, the Provincial Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, the Provincial Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. The full participant list shown in Attachment 1.

The main purpose of this facilitated session was for the City to hear from participants about their concerns and recommendations related to theft and property crime. This memo summarises the

findings and recommendations arising from this conversation. Staff will be evaluating/actioning the participants' recommendations as appropriate over the coming weeks.

## **B. KEY ISSUES RAISED**

The following summarises the key issues and concerns relating to property crime, theft, and violent shoplifting that were expressed by the roundtable participants.

## Shoplifting, graffiti and property crime

1. **Flagrant shoplifting and theft, entitlement.** Some people are entering stores, blatantly stealing, and responding in violent ways if approached by staff. This is causing employees to feel and be unsafe. In situations where employees are working alone, they often need to keep doors locked and “buzz in” customers in which creates an all-around negative environment. Store owners are observing a widespread brazen sense of entitlement from the people stealing, as though they have a right to take whatever they want and walk out without the fear of repercussion.
2. **Theft from sidewalks.** In addition to the goods and food stores, people are also stealing sidewalk displays, furniture and sandwich boards, using as shelter.
3. **Repeat offenders.** There is an acknowledgement that it is the same small group of people over and over again committing these crimes. In some cases, businesses know who they are and recognize their vehicles. It seems there are very few legal consequences for people committing property crimes and theft, and therefore nothing in place to dissuade repeat offenders. It is very frustrating to see repeat offenders committing these acts repeatedly.
4. **Graffiti is harmful, not a victimless crime.** Graffiti is a significant issue and there seems to be a sense that this is a victimless crime but it is a big issue for businesses, and businesses/BIAs are spending significant amounts of money to address graffiti.
5. **Dumpster graffiti is an issue.** The private waste management firms previously provided paint the BIAs could then use to cover the graffiti on their dumpsters, but for some reason this practice has stopped. There is a City bylaw requiring dumpsters and the surrounding area to be clean and free of graffiti but this does not seem to be enforced.
6. **Exterior space associated with vacant business properties not always properly maintained.** Some businesses are not taking care of their property, especially in the permitting stage.

## Impacts on businesses

7. **Safety of employees.** The current situation is taking a toll on business employees. There is a lot of anxiety and fear from employees who are often young, female, and/or people of colour. Businesses need to be safe and secure environments.
8. **Financial burden for businesses.** Businesses are bearing a significant burden financially due to high levels of theft and property damage. They don't want to make a claim against their insurance for fear of rising deductibles or that they won't be able to get insurance if there are too many claims.

## Data, statistics and communications

9. **Substantial under-reporting of property crimes.** Shoplifting and property crime incidents are significantly under-reported by businesses, and therefore the statistics do not show an accurate picture of what is really going on. The crime reporting system needs updating. It should include an easy way to report non-violent crime so there is accurate data to refer to.

Many business owners are reluctant to report property crimes for fear of the impacts on their ability to maintain insurance, and/or on their insurance rates.

10. **Perception that downtown and some neighbourhoods are unsafe.** Residents and visitors are viewing certain neighbourhoods as unsafe, and therefore won't visit them, which threatens the survival of many local businesses. Noted that this is not just a downtown issue, but impacts other business districts as well.
11. **Implications for Vancouver's national and international reputation/tourism industry.** If people elsewhere in the country/world perceive the city as unsafe or unclean, it will take a toll on our visitor/tourism economy. Small things like chipped paint, boarded windows, discarded needles and overflowing garbage cans can really harm the city's worldwide reputation. The reputation of the city is at stake across the country and internationally. Questions are being asked by international visitors around conference attendees' safety and security. Other locations that are perceived as safer will attract visitors.
12. **Media contributes to negative perceptions.** The media's often fear-based approach to reporting is causing problems, focusing too much on negative stories and foregoing more positive ones, and not exploring solutions or guidance on how to overcome these issues as a community.

## C. ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS

Participants shared their recommendations for how the City and other agencies can continue to address property crime, theft, and violent shoplifting, shown below in Table 1.

In discussing solutions, it was noted that:

- The work of the Vancouver Police Department is appreciated and vital but there are not enough resources to address all the issues.
- Many of the issues arising are result of poor mental health, and there are not enough resources to help people in need across Vancouver.
- There is a need to stop the polarizing discussion about policing versus health support initiatives because both are needed.
- Much of the responsibility for clean, safe streets and public spaces has been downloaded to both the City and to the BIAs, and that there is a need to engage other levels of government and other agencies. The issues we are responding to in Vancouver are the result of years of under-investment by senior governments in homelessness supports, housing, and mental health services.

**TABLE 1. ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS' RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING PROPERTY CRIME**

<b>A. INCREASED POLICING, HOMELESSNESS AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS</b>
<p>1. <b>Perceived and actual VPD presence.</b> A sense of neighbourhood safety can be increased by actual and perceived presence of VPD at street level. This can be accomplished with decoy cars, regular foot patrols, VPD trailers parked in high-risk areas (even if unstaffed), pop-up community policing centres, and more initiatives focused specifically on small businesses. This past November's Yaletown anti-shoplifting spotlight was great, would like to see more of these. More regular foot patrol officers assigned to each retail district.</p>
<p>2. <b>More Park Rangers.</b> Increase Park Rangers' presence where they are needed.</p>
<p>3. <b>More transit police.</b> Add more transit police to public transit.</p>
<p>4. <b>More supports for people with addiction and mental health issues, in the Downtown Eastside and other neighbourhoods.</b> More homeless outreach teams and mental health workers are needed, both within and outside the Downtown Eastside for people experiencing homelessness, mental health and addiction issues. Need senior government support to address the underlying causes of poverty and the opioid crisis through safe supply programs, which have been proven to reduce property crimes. Provide more supports for mentally ill and addicted individuals within and outside the Downtown Eastside, especially those who are or are at risk of becoming homeless.</p>
<p>5. <b>Increase VPD funding/resourcing.</b> Provide more resources to VPD overall so they can have more capacity to respond to property crime calls.</p>
<p>6. <b>Escalate seriousness of property crime within the VPD.</b> Ensure that VPD constables take property crimes seriously, and support businesses when reporting these crimes. Help VPD officers understand the significant implications for business owners and the community of what might appear to them as relatively trivial crimes. Ensure more follow up and consequences for "smaller" crimes like graffiti, theft and so on, with the goal of eradicating repeat offenders.</p>
<p>7. <b>Explore restorative justice models.</b> Explore alternatives to the traditional criminal justice system such as restorative justice models that may be more beneficial to communities, victims and long-term community building, e.g., as implemented in Victoria, BC and Hull, UK.</p>
<b>B. DATA, STATISTICS AND COMMUNICATIONS</b>
<p>8. <b>Improve accuracy of property crime statistics.</b> Have the VPD work with BIAs to create more accurate statistics concerning property crime, which are currently significantly under-reported.</p>

9. **Promote positive narrative/media.** Work with media to circulate more good-news stories at a local, national, and international level. Publicize initiatives occurring around the city to draw people back downtown. Encourage people to come shop in the City's various neighbourhoods. Create an intentional communications strategy directed at residents, businesses, visitors and potential tourists.

### C. IMPROVED STREET LIGHTING

10. **Improve both City and private business street lighting.** Provide more lighting on the streets and plazas, via street lighting, at varying vertical heights. In areas where City doesn't/won't provide sufficient lighting, provide power supplies to allow businesses to enhance street lighting.

11. **Amend Sign Bylaw to allow more illuminated signs.** Amend the City's Sign Bylaw to allow businesses to have more illuminated signs as a means of creating more street light, e.g., allow a business on a corner to have two illuminated signs.

### D. CLEANLINESS AND MAINTENANCE

12. **Increase frequency of micro-cleaning.** Increase frequency of street micro-cleaning from twice per week to daily – to clean up blankets, used paper towels, etc., particularly in areas where people experiencing homelessness have slept overnight.

13. **More public washrooms.** Increase access to public washrooms.

14. **Enhance public realm and City infrastructure maintenance.** Request that the City undertakes more frequent light maintenance to address overflowing garbage cans, chipping paint on light poles, graffiti on City's infrastructure, street furniture falling into disrepair, etc.

15. **Sharps containers.** Provide public sharps containers on the streets.

16. **More street garbage cans.** Add more garbage cans where they are needed, and empty garbage cans more regularly so they do no overflow.

17. **Create an Adopt a Garbage Can program.** Create a program similar to the City's Adopt a Catch basin program, in which a business can commit to maintaining the ongoing cleanliness of an individual street garbage can, or a specific set of street garbage cans.

18. **Remove empty newspaper boxes.** Remove empty/derelict newspaper boxes, there are many at the moment.

19. **Enforce maintenance requirements for vacant retail properties.** Enforce City bylaws to ensure business premises are clean, especially for those properties that are vacant and/or awaiting permits.

20. **Decrease permitting wait times.** By decreasing permitting wait times, will create shorter periods of vacant storefronts, and all the associated issues.

**E. ADDRESS GRAFFITTI MORE AGGRESSIVELY**

21. **Reinstate the VPD Anti-Graffiti Task Force.** Reinstate the VPD's anti-graffiti task force.

22. **Implement creative programs to change tagging behavior.** At Mural Fest, it was suggested that a tagger is very early in their stage of artistic expression and needs to move through the stages of learning. Create dedicated spaces for people learning graffiti art to offer an alternative to tagging indiscriminately.

23. **Provision of paint to BIAs by private sanitation companies.** Work with private sanitation companies to reinstate program in which they provided paint to BIAs to clean up graffiti on their dumpsters.

24. **Enforce regulations that require private sanitation companies to maintain dumpsters.** Enforce existing bylaws that require private sanitation companies to clean graffiti on dumpsters, to maintain the overall cleanliness of dumpsters and the space surrounding each dumpster, including micro-cleaning and power-washing by contractors.

25. **Graffiti cleaning supplies to BIAs.** City to provide more supplies to BIAs for graffiti cleaning (have been out of stock for past six months).

**F. ADDRESS SOME PROACTIVE MEASURES**

26. **Review the Downtown Eastside Market model.** There was recognition that there is a legitimate need for the DTES Street market, but there is now a lot of fencing of stolen goods so staff should undertake a review of the Downtown Eastside Market in consultation with the relevant BIAs, to address illegal fencing activity, this is a major problem for Strathcona and Chinatown.

27. **Support bringing people/animation back to downtown.** With the pandemic, there are far fewer people working and spending time downtown and this is leading to the deterioration of public spaces. Many businesses in the downtown core rely on office workers. Increased support is needed to further push the return to work downtown and provide people with more reasons to come downtown such as events, festivals, and public art.

28. **Ensure sufficient retail zoning into the future.** Safeguard retail zoning downtown to preserve small businesses and local culture, which is increasingly under pressure with the addition of shelter spaces in existing retail spaces.

**G. PARTNERSHIP, COLLABORATION AND ADVOCACY**



29. **Advocacy to and partnership with the provincial and federal governments.** Partner with other large Canadian cities to advocate for support to resolve issues related to poverty, mental health and crime, by seeking more resources and support at a district, provincial and/or federal level, including healthcare, government, policing, social services, etc.

30. **Forge improved partnerships and better understanding between businesses and service providers to people experiencing homelessness, mental health and substance use issues.** Advance dialogue and partnerships between service providers and people experiencing homelessness, mental health and substance use issues, to develop solutions that benefit the health and well being of the entire community – dispel the misconceptions held that businesses are insensitive to these issues.

31. **Enhanced communication with/support to BIAs.** Provide more communication to BIAs on network of supports available to them. Also, more communication on how issues are being dealt with, which includes individuals and groups accountable for accomplishing tasks.

32. **Need to move from discussion to action.** There have been a number of similar roundtables held on these issues in recent months. The opportunity to share experiences and work together to find solutions is valued but we need to move to action. We need a clear plan that describes what actions are being taken, who is responsible with a supporting timeline. Develop and circulate a clear action plan to address issues in question with details of accountable entities.

The City Manager's Office will be following up on all of these recommendations with the appropriate City departments to explore actioning, and in early 2022 will bring to Council any associated recommendations that require a Council decision.

Sincerely,



Paul Mochrie  
City Manager

| [paul.mochrie@vancouver.ca](mailto:paul.mochrie@vancouver.ca)

**ATTACHMENT 1.**  
**PARTICIPANTS IN THE DECEMBER 6, 2021 VANCOUVER BUSINESS**  
**ROUNDTABLE ON PROPERTY CRIME, THEFT AND VIOLENT SHOPLIFTING**

1. **Ally Butler**, BC Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions
2. **Annette O'Shea**, Yaletown BIA
3. **Arkun Durmaz**, Yaletown BIA
4. **Bridgitte Anderson**, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
5. **Charlene Abellana**, Downtown Vancouver BIA
6. **Chris Neale-Clark**, Hastings Crossing BIA
7. **Clair MacGougan**, Hastings Sunrise Community Policing Centre
8. **Claudia Laroye**, Marpole BIA
9. **Dan Turvill**, Strathcona Community Policing Centre
10. **David Huynh**, Hastings Sunrise Community Policing Centre
11. **David Van Hemmen**, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
12. **Dr Mark Lysyshyn**, Vancouver Coastal Health
13. **Enzo Papa**, Commercial Driva BIA
14. **Gwendal Castellan**, Destination Vancouver
15. **Ivy Haisell**, South Granville BIA
16. **Jacqui McMullen**, West End BIA
17. **Jane Talbot**, DV BIA
18. **Jordan Eng**, Chinatown BIA
19. **Kelly Finlay**, Yaletown BIA
20. **Michael Jagger**, Kerrisdale BIA/Provident Security
21. **Mike Sauer**, Grandview Woodland Community Policing Centre
22. **Muneesh Sharma**, Robson Street BIA
23. **Neil Wyles**, Mount Pleasant BIA
24. **Nicholes Loberg**, Cambie Village Business Association
25. **Nick Pogor**, Commercial Driva BIA

26. **Nicole Redekop**, Public Safety and Solicitor General
27. **Nolan Marshall**, Downtown Vancouver BIA
28. **Partap Sahota**, Collingwood Community Policing Centre
29. **Patricia Barnes**, Hastings North BIA
30. **Rania Hatz**, Cambie Village Business Association
31. **Rob Nijjar**, Sunset on Fraser Business Association
32. **Rosalind Currie**, Ministry of Public Safety/Solicitor General
33. **Royce Chwin**, Destination Vancouver
34. **Sam Hamilton**, Strathcona BIA
35. **Teri Smith**, West End BIA
36. **Terri Clark**, Kerrisdale BIA
37. **Toni Sun**, Hastings North BIA
38. **Tricia Poilievre**, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions
39. **Vincent Kwan**, Strathcona BIA
40. **Walley Wargolet**, Gastown Business Improvement Society
41. **Waseem Laher**, Downtown Vancouver BIA

Note: In addition to the participants listed above, several senior executive and technical City staff members were also in attendance.

**ATTACHMENT 2.  
OVERVIEW OF KEY CURRENT CITY OF VANCOUVER-LED INITIATIVES  
ADDRESSING PROPERTY CRIME, THEFT AND VIOLENT SHOPLIFTING**

The table below provides an overview of key City of Vancouver initiatives underway or recently completed, that are addressing property crime, theft and violent shoplifting in Vancouver.

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p>1. VPD Project Arrow Shoplifting Response</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Month-long VPD project in January and February 2021, focusing on violent shoplifting incidents – e.g., in which knives, pepper spray, needles, etc. were used during the thefts – in the central business district.</li> <li>• Coordinated approach that included Neighborhood Policing Teams, uniform patrol members, collaboration with local businesses, and loss prevention officers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcomes tied to this initiative to date in 2021:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Created 152 new shoplifting files</li> <li>- 138 arrests, including 15 repeat offenders</li> <li>- 170 criminal charges</li> <li>- \$45,000 recovered property</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>2. VPD Metro Response Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VPD Metro Response Team, commissioned from October 28, 2021 to November 7, 2021 – comprised of 44 officers to address violent incidents and general street disorder in targeted central business district neighbourhoods such as Granville Street, Davie Street, Chinatown, Yaletown.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VPD Metro Response Team generated 103 new files over 11 shifts</li> </ul>

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p>3. VPD Neighbourhood Response Team</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The VPD Neighbourhood Response Team (VPD NRT) was deployed for 42 days, starting early November 2020, to mount a targeted response to a quantifiable increase in serious crime – such as assaults and commercial break-ins – in the Strathcona, Chinatown and Yaletown neighbourhoods.</li> <li>• The VPD NRT was deployed daily with a team of up to six uniformed patrol officers. In addition, two Special Municipal Constables for patrol administrative support were deployed from the Community Safety Program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outcomes tied to this initiative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Involved in 1,408 incidents</li> <li>- Recovered 210 weapons</li> <li>- Dealt with 59 outstanding warrant arrests</li> <li>- Spoke to over 300 people on the street and checked on their safety and well-being</li> <li>- During interactions, VPD NRT members handed out dozens of sleeping bags and snacks donated through charities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>4. Enhanced public space cleaning services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Led by the GM, Engineering Services, enhanced services to support cleanliness in the public realm downtown and in targeted neighbourhoods, with a focus on street cleaning, needle clean-up, feces removal program, graffiti removal, and urban issues support.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invested \$672,000 for enhanced cleaning of priority areas in 2021</li> </ul>
<p>5. Enhanced Public Space Animation Initiatives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To activate clean, animated public spaces, early in the Covid-19 pandemic the City initiated the development of many new public spaces across the city, such as plazas and patios.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created 36 new public spaces in 2020 and 2021</li> <li>• Roughly 700 temporary patios permitted in 2021</li> </ul>

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p>6. Safe and Accessible Parks Program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Board of Parks and Recreation’s is advancing several initiatives to increase the safety and accessibility of City parks.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Increased funding for Park Rangers.</i> Increases in funding allocated to the Park Ranger program for 2022, which will allow for increased patrols, particularly in downtown and inner City parks.</li> <li>- <i>Increased park cleaning services.</i> Increases in cleaning services for the removal of debris and garbage through the addition of a new cleaning crew in 2022 focusing on downtown and inner city parks.</li> <li>- <i>Increased park lighting and infrastructure.</i> Increases investments in park cleanliness, lighting and infrastructure improvements.</li> <li>- <i>Upcoming Neighbourhood Collaboration Program.</i> The coordination of outreach, enhanced cleaning and other peer-based programs will form the basis of the Neighbourhood Collaboration Pilot being developed and brought to Council in early 2022.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced outreach by the Homelessness Services Outreach Team in the Downtown South, Mount Pleasant and West End to connect individuals experiencing homelessness with shelter, longer term housing, income and support services</li> </ul>

INITIATIVE	DESCRIPTION	OUTCOMES TO DATE
<p>7. BIA Partnered Initiatives Focused on Cleanliness and Low Barrier Employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• City is advancing several initiatives in partnership with the Business Improvement Associations to address cleanliness and low barrier employment which include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Graffiti Abatement Grants to BIAs.</i> One-time grant program approved by Council to allocate \$500,000 disbursed across 22 BIAs focused on addressing nuisance graffiti abatement on commercial private property.</li> <li>- <i>Chinatown Community Stewardship Program.</i> Launched in the summer of 2019 with the goal of using community peers to help create a safer, more inclusive Chinatown community – addressing issues that include vandalism, discarded needles, individuals blocking doorways and general safety concerns.</li> <li>- <i>Emergency Graffiti and Security Patrol Top-up funding to the Chinatown BIA.</i> Provided emergency funding for graffiti removal and security patrol to top-up the Chinatown BIA’s existing programming during the pandemic.</li> <li>- <i>Upcoming Neighbourhood Collaboration Program.</i> Neighbourhood Collaboration Program Pilot under development, intended to respond to broad community impacts of unsheltered homelessness people.</li> <li>- <i>BIAs’ advocacy.</i> BIAs advocacy to senior government for policies supporting safe supply, supportive housing, and emergency shelters.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$500,000 disbursed across Vancouver’s 22 Business Improvement Associations to support private property graffiti abatement in July and August 2021</li> <li>• Provided micro-cleaning and low threshold employment opportunities across the city</li> <li>• As a result of the Chinatown Community Stewardship Program, during the period January 1 to October 15, 2021:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Over 15,000 needles collected</li> <li>- 286 formal business interactions</li> <li>- 34 stewards employed</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provided \$68,000 in Emergency Graffiti and Security Patrol Top-up funding to the Chinatown BIA during the period April to December 2020</li> </ul>