



MINUTES
SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
Thursday, December 29, 2022
11:00 a.m.
City Hall Council Chambers
Live Stream Recording: <https://kenora.civicweb.net/Portal/>

Present: Mayor A. Poirier
Councillor R. Bernie
Councillor G. Chaze
Councillor L. Koch
Councillor B. Manson
Councillor L. Moncrief
Councillor K. Van Belleghem

Staff: Kyle Attanasio, CAO, Heather Pihulak, Director of Corporate Services/City Clerk

Call Meeting to Order

Mayor Poirier called the meeting to order at 11:00 a.m.

Blessing & Land Acknowledgement

Delivered by Councillor Moncrief

As we gather, we recognize that we are on Treaty Three Lands which are steeped in rich Indigenous history and home to many First Nations and Metis people today. We continue to be thankful for the partnerships with Indigenous people.

We give thanks for the many blessings we enjoy in the City of Kenora. We seek wisdom in our minds, clearness in our thinking, truth in our speaking and always love in our hearts, so that we may try always to unite the Citizens of Kenora. Let these principles guide us in our decision making.

Declaration of Pecuniary Interest & General Nature thereof

- i) On Today's Agenda
 - ii) From a Meeting at which a Member was not in Attendance
- There were none declared.

Mayor Poirier opened the meeting and advised that the meeting was put together quite quickly. Typically you are required to submit a deputation form in order to speak before Council. For this meeting only, the floor will be opened for anyone who is attending the meeting the opportunity to speak if they wish to do so. Deputations are still required to be five minutes only. This is the start of the journey and where we are trying to go as a community. Mayor Poirier reminded everyone to be respectful during their comments.

Deputations

Dr. Marcia Little, Professional Dental Office on Matheson Street South - Dr. Little is concerned about the increased safety issues in the area of her dental office. There is increased concerns about safety for staff and her patients. Dr. Little is empathetic of the disease of drug and alcohol addiction, but in the challenging times of staffing we need to identify solutions to keep our businesses open.

Rae Bath, Tilley's Pharmasave - Ms. Bath is concerned that locking doors to businesses can't be an option for all businesses nor is a solution. There needs to be another solution. Have had to ban people from store, but there is no way to enforce those bans.

Mary Alice Smith, Chair of Kenora Moving Forward – This is a community group that was established a few years ago. The safety of the homeless people in the street community is the number one concern for the group. We are a diverse community and everyone is being painted with the same brush. Most people out there do not behave the way it has been depicted. They want to be part of the solutions to move forward and there are several factors contributing to the homelessness issue. They operate a safe space between the hours when the shelter closes and the Fellowship Centre opens, they offer a safe space. There is a crisis in the community around housing and mental health supports. They believe that racism is a factor.

Andy Scribilo, Kenora Chamber of Commerce President – We are a community in crisis and are hearing this from businesses and residents. The Chamber has had a safety program in the community for over four years now and has not been successful. The City is looking at doing something and we have to. We all need to be dedicated to finding a solution and set goals of where we want to go. Residents, seniors and working people do not feel safe, and these were identified in the policing survey. The community should come together with open forums. It has to be truth and honesty and evaluate what people have to say.

Craig Lavand, Member of Rat Portage – Speaking on his own behalf, he lived on these streets, and just a few years ago was committing crimes as well. Hurts to see the people suffering and want people to see that it is possible to change and heal. There is so much trauma and the mentality against people is hard to see. Suggestions are to close liquor stores, these people need homes, stop giving out prescription drugs, and it is possible. Need to come together and come up with solutions and we need to move forward. We can't set ourselves back and action is needed.

Mary Badwin – St. Albans Cathedral and a member of Kenora Moving Forward group – At St. Albans they do several things in the community. They run a business called Twice as Nice on the corner of Matheson for the past five years. They serve a lot of people in the homeless community in a variety of ways. It is about us helping people. They also provide Friday night supper and they can stay on cold nights as late as 8 p.m. They have had only one challenging individual and was handled easily.

Peter Kirby – The City needs community partners such as Kenora Chiefs Advisory, Northwestern Health Unit, Morningstar, WHNHAC and All Nations Health Partners at the table. No one has a solution or one right answer. There should be a foot patrol 24/7 and washrooms at Thistle Pavillion 24/7. People need a space to use a washroom and a safe space. Do this for the winter as an experiment and is one thing you could do give people a space to be and action now rather than waiting.

Denise Forsythe – LOWDH Mental Health and Addictions – there has been many initiatives for the mental health and addictions in our community. There are many initiatives that currently exist to ensure food and basic needs are available for the vulnerable population. There are solutions just need to be together. One major challenge they are facing is staffing. Everyone is feeling the same, and they have spent the last two years trying to recruit nursing and staff. There is a significant problem with transient people and add to the support required. It is a small population of people and those people are hurting. They work with a lot of people who are appreciative but there has been a shift in the population and the challenges they are facing at Morningstar. They want to be part of the discussions to work towards solutions.

Meg Illman-White – Community Legal worker at Northwest Legal Centre and part of Kenora Moving Forward – We tend to jump to blaming a particular group of people. What has been happening is awful. We do have a drug crisis here and have inadequate resources for the people in crisis, homeless and facing addictions and mental health issues. Need to embrace a model to end homelessness. We need to find the extra funding to address the issues that are facing the people in crisis. Kenora has the ability to move this in a positive direction.

Mike McEwan – new to Kenora and only been here for 16 months. We came from southern Ontario because we had heard so many good things about Kenora and Lake of the Woods. His wife is afraid to come to town and is afraid of the building that she works in. There are tough questions to be asked and seems that there are bandages that have been attempted. In southern Ontario, you arrest people for drinking and shooting up in the public. We know where the people are and the budget for the OPP is the highest in the province. There is a huge lack of presence here by the OPP.

Steven McDonald – new to Kenora from Toronto he and his wife have relocated here. Find the community very welcoming and it will take everyone to address the issues we are facing here. There are solutions and we don't need to reinvent a solution. We are a hub for our surrounding communities and we need to respect and embrace that. We have a responsibility to those surrounding communities.

Scott Cook, owner of Little Caesars – Lived homeless part of his life. They are going to lose their business downtown because of the threat of the people downtown. They are fighting a losing battle with the abuse and threats they receive daily. Kenora is very important to him and will do anything to help find a solution to this problem. No one wants to work there because they don't feel safe. Have called the OPP and no one ever shows up. This is survival for him now.

Tania Cameron, citizen of Kenora – Understand we need our local businesses and need to support our local businesses. Personally not scared to shop downtown, for the most part are greeted by store owners. There is a lot of trauma in the community and people who are struggling and stuck on the street because services are not there. Concerned with not continuing to support people in need and address the racism in the community.

Chad Gropp – owner of Gropp's Catering – Everything needs to be fixed. He has lost staff, food trucks and business because of the issues. He is looking at downsizing again due to lack of staffing. He does his best to help those who need the help. We should all come together to chip in and help out. Willing to help out more and more to see everyone

succeed. Want to see our town change. As a business owner for 26 years am willing to help more to see people succeed. Asking anyone else who can help out, to please do so.

Jay Barnard, resident - Have been in recovery for 15 years. In 2008 when tried to get help in Kenora there was no help and had to go to Ottawa. Have own program and had to close his business through COVID. Mental health is a massive issue across the world. The issue is not the drugs and alcohol it is the trauma. People are not getting the help they need. We need programming in town from a lived experience side of things. He has the schooling called lived experience and wants to help our City. There is no programming in the jail and it should start there. We need to be open to new things and find funding for people who want to help. He understands what is needed because he was there. We need to be open to these conversations and new things, new narrative. Change is possible.

Elauna Boutwell – Community Space, Kenora Moving Forward – Have seen a ton of real positive upward trends and really good steps in people. See a lot of good in building relationships from many of the groups trying to help. The accessibility and building trust with individuals. The relationship piece and getting to know people will help break the divide and bring people together. The group wants to be part of working together to build relationships.

Johnny Grek – Have recently moved into town and are nervous about bringing his children downtown. He is a physician and works with the population. The HIV and AIDS rates are increasing and the opioids are increasing. People are losing their lives and are feeling a burden of stigma. This crisis is being faced by every community in Canada. Safe supply of opioids is a top priority along with a safe injection site needs to happen and as a collective body of health and social services there is a massive duplication of resources but they need to come together. We are not under resourced, but we need to come together. The All Nations is a great platform to do that, but that is not taking place.

Mayor Poirier noted that we will be moving in-camera to discuss personal information, however, Council has heard all of the public today and are taking all information in. We are doing our part as well and are part of the solution. We will come back out into public session and an opportunity for Councillors to also make any comments in open session. The time that will be is unknown, however, the livestream meeting will resume and the public can view the recording.

1. Adjourn to Closed Session

Moved by R. Bernie, Seconded by L. Koch & Carried:-

That pursuant to Section 239 of the Municipal Act, 2001, as amended, authorization is hereby given for Committee to move into a Closed Session at 12:10 p.m. to discuss the following items:

Personal Matter about an Identifiable Individual (1 matter- downtown safety concerns)

2. Reconvene to Open Meeting

Council reconvenes to open session at 3:42 p.m. with three reports/direction from its closed session include:

- Hiring of the Community Safety and Well Being Coordinator
- Move forward with re-development of Community Safety and Well Being Plan

- Received commitment for increased foot and car patrol in the downtown from the OPP

Council is encouraged by the level of engagement that participated today in the special council meeting both in person and virtually. The systemic problems that we are facing are beyond this Council alone.

We need to care adequately for everyone in our society. It was suggested increased lighting, look at increased access to community improvement funding, and increased foot patrol. Long term goals we can look to address is advocating to provincial partners for support for poverty and lack of housing. Creating strong trusting relationships with our community partners can be utilized for a thoughtful and meaningful way through this.

Everyone should feel safe in their community and we are still getting to know each other and the group is compassionate and caring and community minded and keen to get to work. Good combination to get together to help to solve this and will continue to work together.

Heart goes out to everyone who has suffered violence and the effects of this violence. We will champion to work together in our community to make it better.

Hatred and violence is not the way out of this. Shipping people away is not the way out of this. Small business owners who are considering leaving, please don't. We value you, and we welcome your input and look forward to making steps forward together.

Committed to hiring a community safety and well-being coordinator and will continue with community consultations moving forward. We will get various points of view from the community.

Council had good dialogue today and we can begin to see part of an overall plan that we are looking to achieve and this takes time. It won't happen overnight but thankful to Council for agreeing to a plan forward.

Meeting adjourned at 3:51 p.m.