



NOTES: Kelowna Chamber Crime Roundtable August 15, 2024

In the summer of 2024, three sector-specific Roundtable discussions were held by the Kelowna Chamber focusing on Labour, Crime and Housing. Small groups shared and listened as the Chamber took the pulse on these important issues, both to prepare for our annual November Policy Development Forum and to assist the Board in listening to the business community.

The Crime Roundtable was moderated by Carmen Rempel, Chamber Director, and Executive Director of Kelowna's Gospel Mission

Lists of attendees and submitted questions are attached.

What we heard. . .

There were common themes, as expected, as most municipalities in B.C. and Canada struggle with this issue.

A few key message areas stood out and are worthy of increased advocacy by the Chamber.

Discussion points for policy directions were discussed and were noted.

We highlight some key points, followed by advocacy suggestions.

Issues:

- Homelessness at the core of most problems
- Addiction care still lacking, i.e., Red Fish Healing Centre, Riverview, mandatory incarceration
- Different drugs (fentanyl) causing long-term brain damage
- Retail suffering impact on bottom line: theft, customer attrition, staff issues, security costs
- Bail reform focused on violent prolific offenders; lack of focus on property repeat offenders
- Some jurisdictions do it better than ours: Ontario Mental Health Act more proactive than B.C.'s.
- Bylaw officers could have duties legislated beyond what they are allowed to do currently, as in other provinces
- Learnings from Project Barcode (RCMP) to reduce shoplifting/theft

DKA and URBA on call programs:

Issue: The hamster wheel of mental health and addiction is the issue.

Solution: Advocate for a facility which would host a co-location of services (housing, detox, outreach services) where police, DKA, IH, etc. can bring people experiencing homelessness, rather than just moving them along to the next street corner.

Tourism:

Issue: Issues around illegitimate businesses masquerading as legitimate (wine tour operators, others), and vacant land where loitering, camping takes hold. All the homeless, addiction symptoms noted by Roundtable.

Solution: Development and proactive business to activate spaces over longer hours of utilization; use spaces for vibrant and active business with high traffic; mitigate homelessness and addiction fallout with adequate treatment facilities.

City of Kelowna:

Issue: Mental health, homelessness, and trauma are the three keystones of the problems.

Solution: Increase Care and Consequence through lobbying of all government levels for changes to the Mental Health Act (Ontario is a positive example). Advocate for more crown prosecutors locally to reduce incidence of prolific offenders, particularly as related to property crime.

RCMP:

Issue: Mental health and addiction are at the core.

Solution: Advocate for more resources, both enforcement and services. Note that even if/with increased funding for new RCMP hiring, fewer individuals are choosing law enforcement/peace keeping as a career which creates an additional challenge.

Downtown Retail:

Issue: Fentanyl causes mental health deterioration beyond a point of recovery as is/was possible with earlier illicit drugs (heroin, cocaine).

Solution: Upstream proactive youth work which prevents people from using drugs in the first place. Advocate for harsher penalties for fentanyl dealers - treat dealing as a crime akin to murder. Advocate for mandatory mental health care and more addiction/recovery services.

Rutland retail/URBA:

Issue: Mental health and addiction again lie at the heart of the issue.

Solution: Advocate for a hygiene centre in Rutland so people experiencing homelessness have a place to shower, use the bathrooms, and regain a sense of well-being. Provincial government to consult with the community in advance of in-placing services (cheque distribution on "welfare" day) to avoid community disruption; consult with community 'after the fact' if such facilities are in place and cause community disruption as it the current case.

Rutland retail:

Issue: The move of social services to Rutland (see above comment) increased the traffic of homeless individuals.

Solution: Move MSDPR building to a industrial area away from business, neighbourhood, transit, school core areas.

Kelowna Yacht Club:

Issue: Illegitimate businesses, homelessness, theft, break-ins, threatening staff and youth members, filth.

Solution: ?

Summary of recommendations:

Municipal

- Advocate for increased care services in Kelowna, including long term mandatory care
- Support business development with proactive street presence, utilizing underdeveloped lots for vibrant and active business.
- Activation of spaces.

Provincial

- Advocate for Mental Health Act reform
- Advocate for more local provincial prosecutors.

Federal

- Advocate for bail reform for repeat *property* offenders
- Advocate for adjustments to the criminal code re: property crime

Other recommendations:

Chamber with colleagues (Kelowna's Gospel Mission, RCMP Community Policing) host a panel and/or workshops on crime prevention – what's available to business, particularly those with high staff turnover.

Potential Advocacy & Policy Areas:

Federal: Bail reform to address prolific property offenders

Criminal Code amendments to address prolific property offenders

Provincial: Mental Health Act reform

Increase staffing of provincial prosecutors

Municipal:

Continue work with municipal government and staff around business needs in all affected areas

Caroline Miller

Policy & Government Relations Advisor

Kelowna Chamber of Commerce

August 16, 2024



Crime Roundtable
August 15, 2024

Questions from Participants

1. Are there programs or early childhood education streams regarding what crime actually is and the consequences for committing those crimes? And, if so, at what age are these programs being introduced, and whose responsibility is it to create these programs? And, who would be responsible for identifying the key stakeholders and how they could work together to for early prevention. Example: parents, teachers, school systems, police and the justice system.
2. As an organization – taking into account limitations such as the Charter of Rights, the Criminal Code, and decriminalization of hard drugs – how can the RCMP better serve the business community here in Kelowna?
3. How can we ensure resident and staff safety when people are shooting up outside our doors and entryways? [I have been to talks and training and have heard the stories: it is hard. You want to make eye contact and share some human good will, but many are really scary, not of sound mind, passed out on the ground, defecating on the ground; blood, urine and needles at the library parkade is a daily occurrence without exaggeration.]
4. What can be done to lobby the provincial and federal governments to change the law so that Fentanyl production/distribution (in quantity) can be treated as a crime not unlike murder. [This drug, in particular and unlike most others, creates the mental illness that then becomes the focus to try and manage. I have great sympathy for those already there, but I am very sad to know that many healthy people are unknowingly soon to become victims.]
5. Bail Reform. Bill C48 addresses the issue of repeat offenders, particularly violent offenders. I only see moderate success. What does the Bill do to mitigate the effects of repeat property offenders, such as we see in our local business establishments?
6. Kelowna's ranking in the Crime Severity Index has dropped from #1 to #7. What can citizens do to drop that number even further?
7. Could the DKA extend its 'on call' service to longer hours, earlier in the morning and later at night? What kind of funding or advocacy is needed to make this happen. What are the hours for the Rutland on call service?
8. Should Kelowna build a Redfish-type centre for treatment expansion?

9. There has been a lot of grey area here (mainly as a result of the drug crisis) regarding who should be responding to which calls - do you feel the disconnect between Bylaw Services and the RCMP is lessening, and do you feel supported when you call for assistance?



List of Attendees
Crime Issues Roundtable August 15, 2024
Kelowna Chamber of Commerce Boardroom
544 Harvey

1. Brent Lobson, Director of Operations, Downtown Kelowna Association
2. Chris Lewis, Director of Destination Marketing, Tourism Kelowna
3. Darren Caul, Community Safety Director & RCMP Liaison
4. Michael Kube, Reserve Constable, Community Safety Unit, RCMP
5. Michael Neill, Owner/Operator, Mosaic Books
6. Nancy Wells, Director of Operations, KGH Thrift Store; Past President, URBA
7. Stephanie Larsen, Owner/Operator, Trulli Italian
8. Thom Killingsworth, General Manager, Kelowna Yacht Club
9. Brad Hryhor, Regional Manager, Canco Petroleum

10. Carmen Rempel, Executive Director, Kelowna's Gospel Mission
11. Maryse Harvey, Chair, Kelowna Chamber Board of Directors
12. Colleen Clark, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Kelowna Chamber
13. Caroline Miller, Policy & Government Relations Advisor, Kelowna Chamber

*Notes will be shared with three attendees who were unable to attend:
Berezan Liquor, Cyclepath, Brazoka Association*