

Sunshine Coast Business Community Response to the Adverse Effects of Homelessness and Addiction

Prepared by: [PIVOT Society](#) and [Alyssa Farr](#) of [Purppl](#)
September 2023

Crisis Overview from the Business Community's Perspective

Over the past five years, the Sunshine Coast has witnessed a concerning increase in homelessness and addiction within its communities. This increase can, in part, be attributed to the well-intentioned efforts of organizations such as BC Housing and Vancouver Coastal Health, who introduced low-barrier housing and shelters into the community, including facilities like Raincity. A critical oversight in the implementation of these housing solutions was the insufficient provision of detox, recovery, mental health and well-being support services, and public safety.

The consequences of this gap have resulted in a notable increase of problems ranging from unsanitary living conditions, escalating crime rates, vandalism, heightened aggression, and a disturbing increase in overdoses and fatalities. These consequences have imposed substantial financial burdens, jeopardized safety, and inflicted a profound emotional toll on the community and local business proprietors.

For business owners, the situation has grown increasingly challenging and complex. They are not just exasperated and frustrated; they find themselves overwhelmed by the magnitude of the issues they are facing. These challenges encompass significant financial setbacks and physical damage to their assets, alongside the need to manage increased hygiene risks, navigate confrontations within their establishments, and manage ongoing safety concerns for their staff and patrons.

Amidst these mounting challenges, business owners find themselves in a climate of increasing uncertainty, grappling with feelings of hopelessness and confusion. They seek guidance and support from government, public health, and law enforcement to manage the profound impact these difficulties have on their customers and the overall reputation of their businesses. It's crucial to stress that without effectively addressing homelessness and addiction, the Sunshine Coast could face heightened public safety risks, persistent strain on public services, economic fragility, community fragmentation, policy stagnation, a tarnished reputation, limited cooperation, and hindered service improvements for those in need.

Business Forum

Despite the persistent challenges, the determination of business owners remains steadfast as they unite to confront these adverse effects. This collective commitment culminated on September 26th, 2023, when over 60 participants, including business owners, public officials, and law enforcement officers, convened for a pivotal business forum. Privately sponsored by [PIVOT Society](#) in collaboration with the [Sechelt Downtown Business Association](#), engaged an external facilitator to guide the conversation constructively and safely. The primary objective was to stimulate open dialogue, identify mid-term goals, and explore potential activities and strategies. This report summarizes the insights gleaned from this discussion.

Business-Centric Outcomes

The outcomes expressed by business owners and community members during the forum outline a clear vision for the business community's desired mid-term results. These statements create a shared understanding of the preferred direction, instilling purpose and guidance for business owners to align their efforts, resources, and strategies. These outcomes enable the business community to monitor progress, adjust strategies, and assess the impact of their collective actions in the next 2-3 years, ultimately facilitating positive change and effective responses to critical challenges.

- **Enhanced Safety:** Businesses are well-informed about available safety strategies and support resources, empowering them to better manage security concerns within their establishments.
- **Increased Professional Security Presence:** A visible increase in the presence of trained professionals providing security services in the community, promoting a safer environment for businesses and patrons.
- **Improved Understanding of Homelessness and Addiction:** Greater awareness and understanding of the complex issues surrounding homelessness and addiction within the business community, fostering empathy and informed responses.
- **Policy Changes:** Implementation of regional policy changes, including zoning and by-laws, that support the presence and adoption of essential support services, creating a more conducive environment for addressing homelessness and addiction.
- **Effective Response to Repeat Offenders:** Increased awareness among the business community regarding repeat offenders and the appropriate actions to address these individuals, leading to more effective and coordinated responses.
- **Increasing Awareness Through Evidence:** Expanding the business community's knowledge base about the social, emotional, and economic effects of homelessness and addiction, rooted in evidence, to enable informed decision-making and advocacy.

- **Representation in Community Strategies:** Enhanced representation of business needs and perspectives in community-level strategies aimed at tackling homelessness and addiction, ensuring that business interests are considered in broader initiatives.
- **Training for Engagement and Response:** Increased training opportunities for businesses on how to effectively engage with and respond to individuals who may be intoxicated, experiencing emotional or physical distress, and how to build constructive relationships with vulnerable community members.
- **Increased Public Funding to Support Business-Centric Response Initiatives:** A tangible increase in public funding dedicated to initiatives that specifically support businesses in addressing the challenges posed by homelessness and addiction in the Sunshine Coast

Activities & Strategies

This section summarizes the activities and strategies suggested by the business community to support the achievement of their mid-term outcome objectives. These initiatives encompass advocacy, data collection, preparedness, education, communication, and emergency response efforts, together forming a clear roadmap for collaborative action.

Activity	Strategies
Advocacy to Government and Public Health Officials	<p>Advocacy to Government and Public Health Officials: Advocate to government and health leaders, emphasizing the crisis's urgency and the need for immediate midterm solutions.</p> <p>Letters of Support: Businesses providing letters of support, demonstrating readiness to assist in funding applications and advocacy efforts. These letters showcase a united front and commitment to addressing the crisis.</p>
Data Collection and Analysis	<p>Formal Data Collection and Reporting: Create organized systems for gathering information in our community to show how businesses are affected financially and emotionally by homelessness and addiction. This information helps with advocacy and decision-making.</p> <p>Research and Best Practices Review: Conduct research and review best practices from other communities facing similar challenges. Evaluate the feasibility and potential impact of strategy implementation, adapting successful approaches to the regional context.</p>
Planning and Preparedness	<p>Community Insight: Build a forecasting tool for our community that predicts when new services will start or when existing ones might close, and how this will affect businesses. This tool gives businesses the time they need to get ready and handle changes well.</p>

	<p>Safety Strategies for Businesses: Create a comprehensive list of safety strategies tailored for businesses, addressing security concerns and safety measures.</p> <p>Coordinated Business Security Effort: Implement a coordinated business security effort to address high-risk locations and service hours, including arrivals and departures outside standard business hours. This collective approach enhances safety measures.</p> <p>Crisis Response Protocols: Develop crisis response protocols in partnership with law enforcement and social service agencies to address emergency situations involving individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction in a coordinated and effective manner.</p> <p>Overview of Services and Expected Responses: Develop an overview of available services, actions, and expected responses from social services, public health and law enforcement for support. This clarifies the resources and support networks available to businesses and those facing homelessness and addiction.</p>
<p>Community Education and Engagement</p>	<p>Training for Engaging Safely with Addiction and Homelessness: Provide training to business owners, staff, and customers on how to compassionately and effectively interact with vulnerable individuals.</p> <p>Community Awareness Campaigns: Launch community-wide awareness campaigns that not only inform the public about the challenges faced by businesses but also encourage compassion, understanding, and support for individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction.</p> <p>Annual Progress Reports: Publish annual progress reports that track the community's efforts to address homelessness and addiction impacts on businesses, providing transparency and accountability.</p>

Next Steps

With a clear vision of desired outcomes and an array of strategies, the next crucial step is prioritizing actions. Urgency underscores the need for impactful and resource-efficient measures. The three steps below, provide a structured and strategic path for the community to translate their vision into tangible actions.

- **Prioritization Framework:** Select a framework to evaluate activities based on their perceived effectiveness and resource efficiency. Engage diverse stakeholders for input and rank activities systematically to identify those with the highest potential impact.
- **Enhance Working Group Engagement and Action Plan:** Within the existing committee, bolster engagement among business owners in the working group and establish a comprehensive action plan.

- **Monitoring and Adaptive Management:** Implement a monitoring and adaptive management system to track progress and adjust activities based on real-time data and community feedback. This ensures efficient resource allocation and responsiveness to evolving challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this report acknowledges the unwavering dedication of the Sunshine Coast business community in addressing the challenges presented by homelessness and addiction.

We are pleased to present a summary of this report, framed as a [theory of change](#). A theory of change is a structured framework outlining the guiding principles, interventions, and anticipated outcomes of our community's collective efforts to address the adverse effects of homelessness and addiction for the Sunshine Coast business community. This summary offers a concise overview of the key themes and strategies outlined in the report, providing a clear model for achieving our shared goals.

Furthermore, the qualitative input gathered during the forum has been condensed and can be found in [Appendix A](#).

We extend an invitation to all business owners to consider participation in the community task force. Your involvement is paramount as we embark collectively on this journey towards positive change. To express your interest and obtain further details, please contact the Sechelt Downtown Business Association; sdba@dccnet.com.

Together, a lasting impact can be made, enriching the Sunshine Coast's vitality for generations to come.

Appendix A: Summary of Adverse Effects on Business Community due to Homelessness and Addiction (Qualitative Data)

The qualitative data collected during the Business Forum on September 26th, 2023, shed light on the profound challenges faced by the business community in the Sunshine Coast due to homelessness and addiction. Although these are summarized excerpts and not verbatim transcripts, they encapsulate the sentiments expressed during the forum:

Economic Hardships: Business owners shared stories of financial strain caused by vandalism and repair expenses. One business owner recounted the distressing experience of paying a ransom to retrieve stolen items. These incidents, frequently linked to addiction-related problems, have imposed substantial financial burdens. For instance, businesses cited expenses exceeding \$100,000 for glass repairs within a six-month period. Regrettably, some businesses have even been forced to close as a result of these financial challenges.

Safety Concerns: Business owners expressed growing safety concerns, describing the atmosphere on the streets as "apocalyptic" in the early morning. Acts of aggression from individuals suffering from addiction, the presence of feces, and an overall feeling of insecurity after dark deterred both customers and business owners from venturing out.

Recurring Offenses: There were repeated instances where business owners reported theft and criminal activity, with some individuals repeatedly breaching their conditions after arrest. A gap in communication and coordination between law enforcement and the court system was noted.

Need for Effective Reporting: Many business owners voiced concerns about reporting incidents effectively. They highlighted the importance of improved reporting systems and clear guidelines for reporting incidents such as drug-related activities to enable law enforcement to take appropriate action. The current process of reporting is time intensive which is an additional cost.

Lack of Supportive Services: The business community discussed the need for supportive services, especially in the context of housing for individuals with addiction issues. Questions arose about why individuals are allowed to live in tents without proper services.

Impact on Employees: Business owners expressed concerns for the safety of their employees, with reports of employees facing theft, aggression, and even the threat of violence. The need for a safe working environment was emphasized.

Community Comparison: Business owners compared Sechelt to other communities, such as Gibsons, in terms of managing the homeless and addicted population. Questions were raised about why Sechelt faced unique challenges.

Rehabilitation and Recovery: The lack of rehabilitation and recovery programs in the area was noted, and some individuals called for the conversion of certain facilities into addiction treatment centers.

These findings highlight the pressing need for coordinated efforts to address the adverse effects of homelessness and addiction on the business community on the Sunshine Coast.

Note: These are summarized excerpts from the qualitative data collected during the Business Forum and do not represent verbatim transcripts.