

# Strathcona County panhandling response

September 19, 2023

# Motion

THAT Administration prepare a report for Council's consideration by the end Q3 2023 with options, including but not limited to potential bylaws, fines and community support services, to deter, assist and promote the safety of individuals engaged in panhandling in Strathcona County.

# Panhandling definition

**“A request, whether by spoken, written or printed word, or gesture, for donations of money or other things of value for one’s self or for any other person.”**

- An informal economic activity
- A *Charter*-protected form of freedom of expression
- Similar to charitable solicitation
- Panhandling is separate from:
  - following people
  - blocking the paths of pedestrians or vehicles
  - verbal and physical harassment
  - public intoxication

# History of panhandling in Canada

1950s	Legislation concerning the status of property simplified; panhandling completely banned
1972	Panhandling decriminalized federally, with panhandling responses left for cities and provinces to legislate
1990s-2005	Some municipalities (Winnipeg 1995, Vancouver 1998, Saskatoon 1999) and provinces (BC 2005, ON 2000) pass strict panhandling laws; which have faced <i>Charter</i> challenges
1999-2005	Winnipeg, Vancouver, BC and ON slowly shift away from legal approaches toward workable solutions



- Edmonton and Calgary have some the harshest punishments for panhandling (up to \$10K)
- Approaches vary widely from city to city and province to province
- Many municipalities who passed strict panhandling laws have since shifted away to address the root causes of panhandling

# Demographics

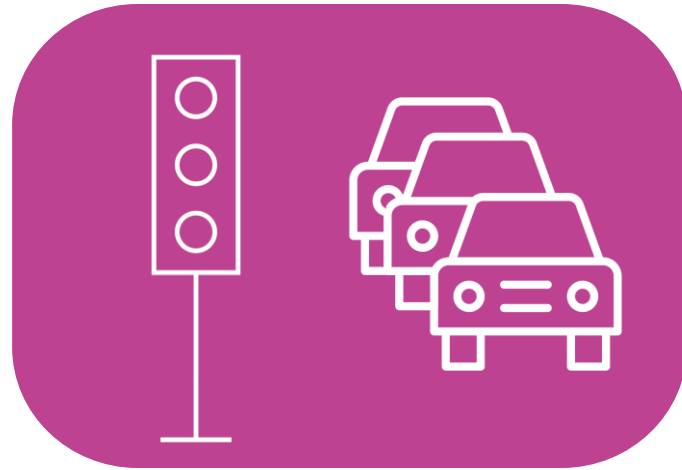
- Qualitative data indicates that those who panhandle in Canada:
  - Are predominately single males
  - Live in extreme poverty
  - Primarily ages 25-44
  - Experience high levels of unemployment (85%)
  - Often report having at least one disability
  - Often receive income from other sources and systems
  - Are likely the most visible group among people experiencing financial hardship in any city



# Myths & realities of panhandling

Myths	Realities
Some, if not most, people who panhandle are not genuinely in need	Panhandling is a symptom of poverty and not a condition chosen freely Panhandling income most often goes to basic needs, including housing
Panhandling is an easy lifestyle that people choose freely	For many, panhandling is a full-time job requiring skill and endurance
It is easy to make large sums of money	Research shows that overwhelmingly, people panhandle “just enough” to meet their next most basic need (roughly \$40/day)  Large sums are possible, though inconsistent and requiring incredibly long hours and are typically for those with stronger needs or wants
Donating leads to increased panhandling	Donations to panhandling does not encourage more panhandling
Groups who organize are more sophisticated and have less need	Panhandling groups offer safety and ability to maximize labour safely
Individuals who panhandle are aggressive and pose a safety threat to the community	People who panhandle are more often the victims than the aggressors in public space

# Existing legislation



The *Traffic Safety Act* is available for meridian panhandling or blocking traffic; ensuring panhandler safety



The *Criminal Code of Canada* for violent or aggressive behaviour; making citizens feel unsafe

# Strathcona County current response



- In addition to the legislation that currently exist to manage panhandling in Strathcona County, patrols engage by:
  - Being actively present in community and understanding the community context
  - Rapport-building with each person stopped
  - Referring to FCS at the direction of the officer
  - Requesting panhandling cease and individuals move along



# Strathcona County current state

2022

- 14 total files
- 4 RCMP complaints
- 10 Enforcement complaints

2022

- 8 calls to Navigation
- 5 community outreach instances

2023

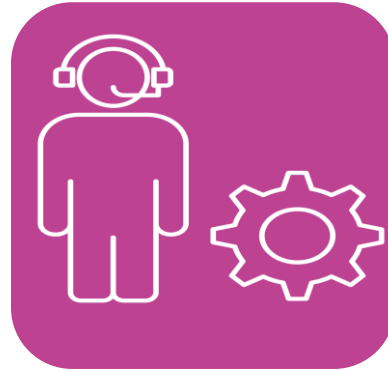
- 17 total files
- 2 RCMP complaints
- 15 Enforcement complaints

2023

- 5 calls to Navigation
- 1 community outreach instance

# Potential responses

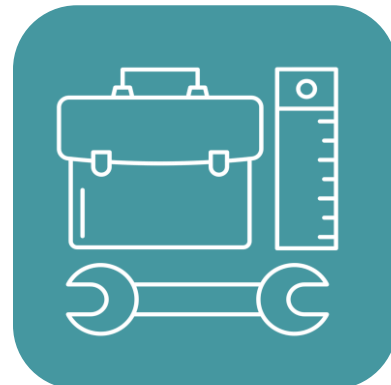
Pair enforcement  
with formal systems  
support



Officer engagement  
with each individual  
panhandling



Address root causes  
of panhandling



Create a bylaw  
limiting when and  
where panhandling  
can occur



Increase public  
education &  
awareness

# Option 1



Create a bylaw that prescribes the time, place and manner of panhandling.

- A bylaw would apply to any person or group (including charitable organizations) engaged in solicitation/panhandling
- It is recommended that a public education campaign be undertaken to ensure that individuals who panhandle are aware of a bylaw and their rights

# Option 2



**(Recommended)** Formalize an approach to the way that officers engage with panhandlers in the County using current legal tools, including when and how referrals to Family and Community Services will take place.

- Pair enforcement with systems support
- Officer engagement with each individual panhandling
- Continue to address the root causes of panhandling

# Questions

