



Committee of the Whole Report

For the Meeting of July 14, 2022

To: Committee of the Whole **Date:** June 30, 2022
From: Philip Bellefontaine, Director, Engineering and Public Works
Subject: School Crossing Guards Program - Update

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive this report for information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Victoria has a long history of supporting road safety initiatives at and adjacent to public elementary, middle and high schools located throughout the municipality. Ongoing efforts have included financial support for paid crossing guard services, participation in the Ready, Set, Roll Program, support for road safety education campaigns and special initiatives like School Streets, as well as transportation infrastructure upgrades to support road safety and encourage walking, rolling and cycling.

Partnerships with School District 61 (SD61), school administration, parent advisory councils and agencies such as the CRD and ICBC have helped to leverage and extend the reach of City-led programs and investments.

For more than three decades, the City has provided grant funding for the provision of paid adult crossing guard programs. Beacon Community Services provided the service for several years and when they were no longer able to continue the program the Greater Victoria Crossing Guard Association (GVCGA) was formed and continued to provide this service throughout SD61. Over the past four years, the City has provided funding to the Association to support crossing guard services.

In 2021, the GVCGA signalled that they may not be in the position to provide crossing guard services in future school years. Following direction from Council in December 2021, funding was provided to ensure services could continue until December 2022 with on-going stable funding included as part of future annual Financial Plans. The 2021 letter from the GVCGA highlighted that on-going, stable year-over-year funding, was a key concern for the Association. At the same Council meeting in December, staff were directed to complete an assessment to confirm the number and location of crossing guard sites was appropriate and met the needs of school communities.

Throughout 2022 staff have been in communication with the GVCGA to make them aware of the City's intention to provide on-going budget with stable, non-application-based funding as approved through the 2022 Financial Plan and to make them aware of the technical review underway to look at historical, existing, and potential future sites with a goal to ensure that services are matched with

need. In June 2022, the City received formal notification indicating that the GVCGA would no longer be providing crossing guard services to any school in the region.

Despite the cessation of the GVCGA crossing guard services, the City has confirmed funding for fall 2022 as well as future years, as previously directed by Council. City staff have had initial conversations with other municipalities who were also previously served by the GVCGA and have reached out to staff at School District 61 to share the City's support and desire for a sustainable, regional delivery model for crossing guard services. Irrespective of the ongoing discussions on crossing guard services, the City will continue to deliver transportation infrastructure improvements at and adjacent to schools to support road safety.

PURPOSE

To update Council on the recent notification of cessation of services from the GVCGA and identify next steps to support the continuation of paid adult crossing guards as part of the City's mobility priorities.

BACKGROUND

The City of Victoria has a long history of supporting road safety initiatives at schools with improvements such as:

- New crosswalk installations and upgrades
- Parking restrictions to improve sightlines between children and drivers
- Cycling and pathway infrastructure
- Speed humps
- Sidewalk widening, curb bulges and curb cuts
- High-visibility school zone signs, road markings and "bollard zones"
- Pedestrian controlled traffic signals and pedestrian-leading intervals at signals
- Speed zone enforcement by Victoria Police
- Support for the "school Streets" and "Ready Set Roll" Programs
- Financial support for paid adult school crossing guards

In School District 61, school crossing guards are funded through a mixture of contributions from local governments (Oak Bay, Saanich, Esquimalt, View Royal, Victoria), fundraising by Parent Advisory Councils, agency partners (such as the Greater Victoria Harbour Authority) and community foundations.

The crossing guard service has been facilitated through different organizations over the years including the Victoria Federation of Parent Advisory Councils, Beacon Community Services and, more recently, the GVCGA. This Association was established in 2018 with the express mandate to hire guards and manage the program.

In 2021, the Association applied for \$61,400 to support eight crossing guards at seven locations within the City of Victoria. They received partial funding in the amount of \$21,490 which lasted until December 1, 2021. Council provided additional funding (up to \$50,000) on December 16, 2021, to extend the program at all active sites for the remainder of the school year and directed staff to include \$62,000 in funding within the annual financial plan, thereby providing annual funding certainty. At the same meeting, Council asked staff to undertake a review of the crossing guard sites within the City.

In June 2022 staff received notice from the GVCGA that they would be ceasing their services and the Association was unaware of any other party willing to continue the service and play a coordinating role.

ISSUES & ANALYSIS

Crossing Guard Locations and Technical Assessment

Following direction from Council, a technical evaluation of all existing crossing guard locations and a number of intersections adjacent to schools was undertaken in conjunction with outreach to the elementary school administrators. As a first step to the assessment staff identified every crosswalk located within 500m of all schools and prioritized them based on roadway characteristics, vehicle volumes, lighting/visibility, historical collision data and proximity to the school. Following this initial assessment, a detailed review of 16 intersections was completed with staff visiting locations and collecting user data during peak pick up and drop off times. This assessment confirmed that the locations currently funded by the city were the highest ranked crossings in the city.

The School Crossing Guard Program is valued by school communities and is seen as providing a positive contribution towards encouraging and promoting safe behaviours by all road users and staff recognize this broader value of having them present during school arrival and departure times. At its June 2022 meeting, the City's Active Transportation Advisory Committee also cited the broader benefits of crossing guards in building a culture of road safety and passed a motion to support continuation of the program by working with the School District, individual schools and/or other municipalities.

Future Crossing Guards Service Delivery

Providing paid adult crossing guard services requires significant coordination including recruiting, training, insurance, scheduling and personnel management. The GVCGA, and Beacon Community Services prior to 2018, relied on funding from local governments and other partners, as well as a voluntary board of directors who contribute substantive in-kind support to operate the program.

Following the notice of cessation of services, staff assessed whether a crossing guard program for Victoria could be administered directly by the City. This approach is not favoured by staff as it would be considerably more costly given the City would be required to establish an entirely new group of staff with field, supervisory and administrative support to provide the program for the up to two hours a day, requiring a split shift. Further, unless all municipalities within SD 61 were to establish their own programs, there would be inconsistency between schools within the District.

In School District 62 (Sooke) and School District 63 (Saanich) crossing guard services are provided directly by each District, with unionized educational assistants who are already employed at the school. Municipal partners contribute to the costs of services. The considerations for this model include:

- On-going, familiar and consistent staff who are already involved in day-to-day activities within the school community.
- Avoiding having to recruit and hire an employee for up to 2 hours per day, which has been a reported challenge by both Beacon Community Services and the GVCGA.
- A more sustainable funding approach as staff are already onsite for work - meaning additional time at the beginning and end of the day for crossing guard services can be added on to a shift.

- More responsive management of the service to respond to issues such as crossing guard holidays and absences.

Mindful of this neighbouring School District context, the focus of staff discussions with the other agencies will be on establishing a replacement program that is consistent across SD61, administered centrally and financially supported by the local municipalities.

Next Steps

On June 20, 2022 the School District Board met and received communications regarding the conclusion of crossing guard services and referred the matter to their staff. The District of Saanich will be considering this topic at its July 4, 2022 meeting. Staff at both the Township of Esquimalt and District of Oak Bay have signalled their willingness to explore options for services and availability of funding sources. The Township is also planning infrastructure upgrades at sites where crossing guards have historically operated.

Clearly, the announcement confirming the cessation of the service has left very little time for municipalities and the School District to explore alternate means to deliver a regional crossing guard service and at the time of writing this report, staff had limited information available on what concrete next steps might be possible. There is the potential that there will be an absence of guards operating at schools within SD61 after the summer break despite the efforts of municipal staff and the School District and staff plan to reach out to school administrators in August 2022 when schools re-open to provide an update on program status. Staff will also revisit all locations currently served by crossing guards to ensure that signage, traffic signal timing and other aspects of the crossings are prepared for the start of the 2022/2023 school year. Staff will continue to liaise with the School District and neighbouring municipalities and any further information as a result of this will be shared by staff verbally when this report is presented to Council.

As noted, the city has undertaken several infrastructure upgrades at and adjacent to schools and will continue to implement road safety improvements. The locations where crossing guards were previously operating until the cessation of the services have seen specific improvements including:

- Shelbourne & Ryan: Pedestrian Activated Traffic Signal
- Hillside & Gosworth: Pedestrian Activated Traffic Signal
- Fairfield & Irving: Crosswalk with Pedestrian Activated Rapid Flashing Beacon
- Quadra & Finlayson: Traffic Signal with extended “walk time”
- Fairfield & Moss: Traffic Signal with Leading Pedestrian Interval
- Michigan & Douglas: Crosswalk with Pedestrian Activated Rapid Flashing Beacon
- Cook and Princess: Pedestrian Activated Traffic Signal

Staff will continue to liaise with individual school Parent Advisory Councils and school administrators through the Ready, Set, Roll program, the traffic calming program, and other operating programs during the 2022/2023 academic year.

OPTIONS & IMPACTS

Impacts to Financial Plan

Ongoing annual funding of \$62,000 has been incorporated into the 2022 financial plan to cover all current school locations within the City of Victoria going forward, thereby providing ongoing year-on-year certainty. The estimated amount is based on costs for the 2021/2022 school year and can be updated following confirmation of an updated delivery model.

Official Community Plan Consistency Statement

The crossing guard program is aligned with policy 7.18: *Support efforts of the school district and other organizations to develop safe routes to school to encourage physical activity and independence in children* in the Official Community Plan and supports Vision Zero targets within Go Victoria, the City’s sustainable mobility strategy.

Accessibility Impact statement

The presence of crossing guards can further support mobility needs among children and adults with disabilities by providing added presence on roadways during peak hour travel. Continued upgrades to crossing infrastructure, including accessible signals, tactile domes and curb cuts, will also aid in removing barriers from the built environment.

CONCLUSIONS

With the recent withdrawal of services by the GVSCGA, the City will continue to work with staff at neighbouring municipalities and School District 61 to assess options and consider collaborative solutions to providing crossing guard services for the upcoming and future academic years. The City will also continue to assess and implement further infrastructure improvements and support educational programs to support road safety for schools.

Respectfully submitted,

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Ross Kenny
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Report accepted and recommended by the City Manager.

List of Attachments

Appendix A: Letter from Greater Victoria Crossing Guards Association