



MEDIA RELEASE

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Chamber Members Concerned about State of Downtown

Kelowna: Downtown businesses are increasingly concerned about the state of the street environment, especially in the Leon and Lawrence area. That's the result of a recent survey the Kelowna Chamber conducted among its members in the downtown. The Chamber asked whether safety and security concerns had changed over the last year; the majority (82%) of the respondents stated their concern had increased. The Chamber surveyed its downtown business members in late July to gain better information on the business environment, especially in the Leon - Lawrence area.

"Although our downtown members make up just a small part (15%) of our 1200 membership, their concerns are important to us," said Tom Dyas, Past President of the Chamber of Commerce in Kelowna. "Starting last fall and extending through this spring, we received a number of calls and emails from our members downtown raising concerns around safety and security, both for their employees and their customers, and it was important for us to try and quantify the extent of the concern."

The Chamber decided a survey would help get a snapshot of what members' views are on the issue and if the current situation is having a tangible impact on their business. With about 200 members of the Chamber located in the downtown core, the Chamber realizes the results of the survey may not be applicable to all businesses in the downtown. However, there are clear trends that are a concern – including that businesses are incurring additional costs related to an increase in nuisance and criminal activity in the downtown. Much of this appears to center on increased security and maintenance costs.

"We first raised our concern with the City last fall," said Dyas, who added, "The City has responded with a number of initiatives aimed at improving conditions in the downtown and the business community is appreciative of that effort but believe more can be done. We are also hopeful that the recent hiring of former RCMP Superintendent Bill McKinnon to review the situation downtown and elsewhere will lead to tangible action to improve safety for both customers and those who work downtown."

Three-quarters of those who responded to the survey thought the Chamber should be doing more to encourage the Province to re-locate emergency shelters away from high-traffic commercial corridors and to consider more of a dispersed model with reduced number of clients at each shelter such that problems don't escalate beyond what can be managed by the RCMP, by-law officers and current private security services. The survey respondents also encouraged the Chamber to lobby the City and Province to increase funding for mental health and additional services to help those who need it. Ensuring people have a roof over their heads is important but so too is having adequate resources to help those who are severely addicted or have mental health challenges.

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