

## COMMUNITY PROPERTY SAFETY TEAM (CPST) PILOT PROGRAM

### RECOMMENDATION

That the October 30, 2023, Office of the City Manager report OCM01796, be received for information.

<b>Requested Council Action</b>	Information only		
<b>ConnectEdmonton's Guiding Principle</b>	<b>ConnectEdmonton Strategic Goals</b>		
<b>CONNECTED</b> This unifies our work to achieve our strategic goals.	<b>Healthy City</b>		
<b>City Plan Values</b>	LIVE		
<b>City Plan Big City Move(s)</b>	A community of communities	<b>Relationship to Council's Strategic Priorities</b>	Community Safety and Well-being
<b>Corporate Business Plan</b>	Serving Edmontonians		
<b>Council Policy, Program or Project Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem Properties Initiative</li> <li>• Tax Subclass for Derelict Properties</li> </ul>		
<b>Related Council Discussions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CS00896, Problem Properties Initiative Update, City Council, April 19, 2022</li> </ul>		

### Executive Summary

- At the April 19, 2022, City Council meeting, the following motion was approved:
  - That the Fire Rescue Services Branch, Office of the City Manager, 2022 operating budget be increased by up to \$850,000 on a one-time basis with funding from the Edmonton Police Services funds held within Financial Strategies, for the purpose of extending the Community Property Safety Team pilot for up to 18 months, and prepare an unfunded service package for consideration at the 2023-2026 budget.
- The Community Property Safety Team (CPST) is a pilot program that works alongside the Problem Properties Team and the Residential Safety Compliance Team as part of the overarching Problem Properties Initiative.

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- Using the Alberta Fire Code and the *Municipal Government Act*, the CPST can secure structures and hold property owners responsible for those unsecured, vacant buildings that pose a fire risk to the surrounding community.
- The pilot targets properties in Alberta Avenue and Downtown, and has been measurably effective. By the end of 2023, the program is projecting a 31 per cent decrease of structural fires in these neighbourhoods compared to an 8 per cent decrease in structural fires citywide.
- 54 per cent of 593 inspected properties have resulted in remedial action; greatly reducing the structural fire risk of almost 320 properties.
- Funding for the pilot will end December 2023. Administration will be submitting an unfunded service package for consideration in the Fall 2023 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment.

## REPORT

The Community Property Safety Team (CPST) is a pilot program that works alongside the Problem Properties Team and the Residential Safety Compliance Team as part of the overarching Problem Properties Initiative. The CPST addresses the problem of fires in unsecured, vacant properties, and is a joint effort between Edmonton Fire Rescue Services and the City of Edmonton's Community Standards and Neighbourhoods Branch. The pilot program began in April 2022 and is funded to run until the end of December 2023.

Structural fires have a large financial impact on the community as neighbouring properties and lives can be damaged by fire and/or smoke. They put pressure on multiple agencies, including Edmonton Fire Rescue Services, Edmonton Police Services and Alberta Health Services Emergency Medical Services, negatively impacting overall response times to emergencies citywide. Fires in illegally occupied structures present unique and highly elevated risks for responding firefighters, those in neighbouring properties and those illegally occupying the properties.

Prior to the creation of the CPST pilot, two people died and one firefighter was placed in significant danger due to vacant property fires. Subsequently, a Community Risk Assessment identified that fires in illegally occupied properties are a leading risk to the safety of firefighters and the community, and that the frequency of these structural fires was increasing.

The CPST consists of Fire Safety Codes Officers designated with authority under the *Municipal Government Act* to issue orders under sections 546(1) and 551(1) of the Act. This allows them to issue notices and orders to the property owners of non-compliant properties and to proceed with immediate remedial actions where required.

Vacant properties are referred to the CPST for inspection by Fire Prevention Officers, through public reporting and from multiple partner agencies such as the Edmonton Police Service and City of Edmonton Bylaw Enforcement. The CPST follows an escalating model of enforcement. The model includes extremely thorough boarding, fencing, intermittent on-site security and up to 24/7 on-site security, all billed to the non-compliant property owner. If a property owner does not pay the invoice,

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the amount owing will be added to their tax roll account. During each escalation, a series of monitoring inspections occur to ensure the site is safe and the current level effective.

Since the CPST pilot was created, Council added another tool to its problem properties approach. The Mature Area Derelict Residential subclass allows the City to charge a higher tax rate to owners of properties that are assessed as derelict. Starting in 2024, the new subclass can be applied to residential properties in mature neighbourhoods that show serious signs of neglect, are falling into significant disrepair or are unlivable. To drive change, this taxation mechanism works in complement to the operational activities of the CPST team.

### **Impact**

The CPST has demonstrated a measurable reduction to the occurrence of structural fires in targeted neighbourhoods. The pilot operated for approximately 15 months, targeting efforts in Alberta Avenue and Downtown. Over the CPST's operational time, there was a 31 per cent decrease in structural fires. As well, the program exposure has led to increased public awareness, resulting in an eight per cent reduction of structural fires citywide. Approximately 54 per cent of the 593 properties inspected by the CPST within the target neighbourhoods required remedial action. This equates to a potential avoidance of almost 320 structural fires in Alberta Avenue and Downtown.

The demand for this work shows no signs of abating. As of October 17, 2023, there are 54 properties that require assessment. The team is receiving three times as many referrals compared to when the program began (nine properties/week, an increase from three properties/week). The volume challenges result in increased timelines to board/secure properties (80 days, compared to the initial turnaround time of 25 days) and complete regular maintenance inspections of the 346 properties currently in CPST secured status.

### **Budget/Financial Implications**

The \$850,000 of funding approved in 2022 will support the CPST pilot until the end of December 2023. At the time of 2023-2026 budget submissions, the CPST pilot had been underway for a short period of time and it was too soon to assess the full impact of the program. As a result, it was decided to bring an unfunded service package closer to the end of the pilot program when there was more robust data to support decision making.

Administration included an unfunded service package to extend the CPST into an ongoing program, in the net amount of \$462,000, for Council consideration during the Fall 2023 Supplemental Operating Budget Adjustment. The service package request includes funding for five FTEs as well as the board-up costs of unsecured vacant properties, which are anticipated to be recovered from property owners.

### **Community Insight**

In early 2023, the CPST attended neighbourhood Meet and Greet events in several affected communities as part of the Problem Property Initiative to share the new approach to problem properties, introduce the new specialized teams, and hear from those most impacted by these

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properties. Meet and Greet events took place in Eastwood, Alberta Avenue and McCauley. The events were open for anyone to attend.

The program team heard that derelict and/or unsecured buildings are a long-standing and significant concern for community members, business owners and organizations in neighbourhoods. Ninety-four per cent of attendees reported that the event increased their understanding of how the City of Edmonton and its partner agencies are addressing problem properties and 88 per cent reported that the event gave them confidence that the City has a good strategy and the tools in place to address problem properties.

### GBA+

A GBA+ review identified a number of findings, including:

- **Vulnerable Populations:** It was identified that individuals accessing unsecured and vacant properties often belong to vulnerable populations. This includes individuals or groups facing various intersectional barriers such as housing needs, mental health issues, episodic homelessness, low income or substance abuse issues.
- **On-Site Support & Referrals:** Administration recognized the necessity for CPST to have access to onsite-support and referrals when encountering vulnerable populations occupying these properties. This will ensure that appropriate assistance and resources are provided to those in need.
- **Preventative Services:** Additionally, the review emphasized the importance of focusing on preventative services that are readily available. By proactively addressing the needs of vulnerable populations, CPST can work towards mitigating potential risks and providing support before situations escalate.