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PLANNING AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, JULY 17, 2024

SUBJECT Bylaw Notice Enforcement and Adjudication System

ISSUE SUMMARY

A Bylaw Notice Enforcement and Adjudication System (BNEAS) is an alternative to the Municipal Ticket Information (MTI) System for ticketing of bylaw contravention. The system enables a more efficient and cost-effective administrative process for dealing with bylaw infractions and has been identified by Capital Regional District (CRD) Bylaw and Animal Care Services as one of the tools to assist in improving the efficiency of enforcing and gaining compliance with bylaw contraventions.

BACKGROUND

The current process for dealing with minor bylaw offences was adopted by the CRD in 1990, by the creation of Bylaw No. 1857, Capital Regional District Ticket Information Authorization Bylaw, 1990.

CRD currently utilizes the MTI system for issuing tickets related to bylaw contraventions, with fine amounts ranging from \$50 to \$1000. Over the past three years, 5,579 violation warnings or MTIs have been issued, 3,811 of which were issued in relation to CRD bylaws only, the balance was issued for municipalities within the CRD for contracted services.

Ticketing is a proven tool for bylaw violations; however, the current MTI system does not support effective and cost-efficient enforcement and can become extremely onerous due to the requirement for personal service of tickets, the high cost of court prosecutions and the additional staff time required.

In 2003, the Province enacted the *Local Government Bylaw Notice Act* ("the Act") creating a framework for a streamlined non-judicial system for local governments to deal with bylaw ticket disputes. The Act was developed to create a simple, fair, and cost-effective system for dealing with bylaw infractions through the creation of a BNEAS.

The Act, and the authority it provides to establish an adjudication system, applies to both municipalities and regional districts by regulation. Currently, 123 local governments in British Columbia have proceeded with a BNEAS.

Under the MTI system, tickets must be personally served and disputed tickets can only be adjudicated at the Provincial Court level. There are approximately 30 disputes annually. Some disputes are prosecuted by bylaw staff, and more complicated disputes require outside legal counsel. Both options have added costs. The hearings can span over more than one year due to scheduling, witness availability, evidence, etc. which also leads to additional legal expenses and staff time charged to the service choosing to enforce its bylaw. The standard of proof for the prosecution of MTIs in Provincial Court follows the criminal threshold of proving the offence 'beyond a reasonable doubt'.

The use of the Bylaw Dispute Adjudication process continues to expand throughout the province and currently includes over 120 local governments using this system. The goal of the adjudication model is to create simple, fair, and cost-effective systems for dealing with minor bylaw infractions.

If the CRD implements the BNEAS we would join the City of Colwood and City of Langford who are actively using the system; the Town of View Royal, District of Central Saanich, North Saanich, Highlands and Metchosin may also join once their bylaws are approved.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Planning and Protective Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

- 1) That a Bylaw Notice Enforcement and Adjudication System be endorsed;
- 2) That staff be directed to prepare bylaws, policies and agreements for the implementation of the Bylaw Notice Enforcement and Adjudication System provided for in the *Local Government Bylaw Notice Enforcement Act*, for the Board's approval; and
- 3) That staff be directed to work with Court Services Branch, Ministry of Attorney General to request the Lieutenant Governor in Council of the Province of British Columbia enact a Regulation under Section 29 of the *Local Government Bylaw Notice Enforcement Act*, applying the *Act* to the Capital Regional District.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information based on Electoral Areas Committee direction.

IMPLICATIONS

Alignment with Board & Corporate Priorities

The introduction of a BNEAS supports the Board's focus on the delivery of efficient, effective and economically viable services as well as the opportunity to partner with other local governments in the delivery of services.

Operational Implications

The BNEAS improves enforcement by providing a more accessible venue for determining simple bylaw contraventions. It also reduces the demands on the court system, is less expensive to administer, and better balances between the amount of the penalty imposed (currently set by legislation at a maximum of \$500) and the staff-time cost of pursuing the bylaw contravention in court. The burden of proof is also lessened – to balance of probabilities rather than beyond a reasonable doubt. However, the system would not replace the MTI system, the traditional long-form offence which permits larger penalties, or the ability of the CRD to pursue more serious matters through injunctive relief from the courts.

Of further benefit, Bylaw Notices issued under this system do not require personal service. The current Municipal Ticket (MTI) requires personal service, which can be difficult to achieve if the person cannot be located or lives outside of the region. The BNEAS offers the ability to mail violation notices which is a major improvement on the current ticketing system, as there are now many occasions when the infraction occurs after hours or is known to have been committed by an out-of-town contractor or property owner. This step is a considerable saving of time and effort and reduces delays in the enforcement of bylaw contraventions.

Once the Bylaw Notice is received or presumed to be received, it becomes legally binding, and the recipient has a fixed period of time to dispute the notice or be deemed convicted. If disputed, internal staff designated as Screening Officers review disputed tickets with authority to enter into compliance agreements. If no resolution can be achieved by Screening Officers, an independent bylaw adjudicator will take submissions and render a decision.

To participate in this system a local government is required to have the Ministry of the Attorney General enact a regulation to make the *Act* applicable to them. To do so, the Board must pass a resolution to pursue the development of the BNEAS. Once the Attorney General has registered the CRD under the *Act*, the CRD's bylaws may be amended to implement the BNEAS. A new Screening Officer Policy is also recommended to be prepared as an integral part of the system. This process is outlined in the Local Government Bylaw Dispute Adjudication System Tool Kit (Appendix A).

Financial Implications

The Bylaw Notice Registry can be established with minimal cost using existing software and trained staffing. The Screening Officer Policy and Bylaw are drafted by Bylaw staff and will be reviewed by the Legal and Risk Division before submitting, there may be an added cost only if outside legal is required to review.

The BNEAS creates efficiencies that will save time and money regardless of the number of tickets that are disputed.

Intergovernmental Implications

Under the *Act*, local governments are responsible for the costs of setting up and administering the system within their jurisdiction. The *Act* specifies that local governments may join together to administer the adjudication system jointly to cover a broader geographic area more cost-effectively. Those local authorities that do not transition to the BNEAS will remain status quo under the current contractual arrangements. Those jurisdictions that do move to the BNEAS will benefit from the system efficiencies and improved compliance. Any enforcement undertaken by CRD Bylaw for the CRD or contracted municipalities using the MTI ticketing process will continue to follow current processes.

Service Delivery

By implementing a system of bylaw infraction dispute review (screening) and independent adjudicators, the CRD is looking to ensure that the regulatory provisions of its bylaws are understood and complied with, and that bylaw contraventions are dealt with in a fair, equitable and cost-efficient manner for all concerned through a modern, timely, effective, and efficient bylaw enforcement service for the CRD and the contracted municipalities we serve that have adopted the system.

To meet this goal, the adjudication model will:

- Eliminate the requirement for personal service of tickets.
- Establish a dedicated forum for resolving local bylaw enforcement disputes.
- Use a dispute resolution-based approach to obtaining independently adjudicated decisions without the need for a court appearance.
- Avoid the unnecessary attendance of witnesses.
- Avoid the need to employ lawyers or enforcement officers to take minor cases to court.
- Promote the timely resolution of bylaw enforcement disputes of a minor nature where the expertise of a Provincial Court or Judicial Justice of the Peace is not needed.
- Provide citizens with an expedient and fair way to dispute tickets.
- Minimize the requirement for officers to engage hostile and non-compliant clients, making it safer for officers.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the BNEAS improves bylaw enforcement by providing a more accessible venue for adjudicating minor bylaw contraventions. It reduces demand on the Provincial Court system and creates a simple, fair, and cost-effective compliance system which represents best practices in bylaw enforcement.

RECOMMENDATION

The Planning and Protective Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board:

- 1) That a Bylaw Notice Enforcement and Adjudication System be endorsed;
- 2) That staff be directed to prepare bylaws, policies and agreements for the implementation of the Bylaw Notice Enforcement and Adjudication System provided for in the *Local Government Bylaw Notice Enforcement Act*, for the Board's approval; and
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ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: Local Government Bylaw Dispute Adjudication System Tool Kit