

# Newcastle Neighbourhood Safety Audit 2021



Nanaimo Community Policing

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# Introduction

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The Nanaimo Neighbourhood Safety Audit is a hands-on crime prevention initiative undertaken by the Nanaimo Community Policing program in collaboration with the RCMP, Neighbourhood Associations, Vancouver Island University, and many other people and organizations in Nanaimo. Safety audits are a useful tool which have been used in many cities throughout Canada and the U.S to help address safety challenges in neighbourhoods.

Safety Audits work to promote neighbourhood safety by identifying factors relating to safety and crime. Safety Audits allow neighbourhoods to work with residents, businesses, police and other agencies to find ways to reduce the opportunities for crime and incorporate relevant crime prevention programming. The findings of the Safety Audits are based on residents' and business owner's experiences and perceptions of crime and safety, crime statistics, social contexts of the local neighbourhood and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments of problematic locations found in the neighbourhood.

Safety Audits have the potential to bring about a wide range of benefits, including:

- Reduction in opportunities for neighbourhood crime by working to address criminogenic factors.
- Identify a neighbourhood's strengths and weaknesses in regards to crime and safety, and work with neighbourhoods to incorporate community safety and crime prevention tools.
- Increase residents' awareness of neighbourhood crime and crime prevention, as well as reduce levels of fear of crime through the spread of information.
- Reduces isolation and creates opportunities for residents and businesses to share their experiences of crime and vulnerability.
- Strengthens connection between residents as they work together to build a strong and healthy neighbourhood.
- Creates a strong relationship between residents, RCMP, neighbourhood associations, blockwatches and other organizations through collaboration and communication.

The Neighbourhood Safety Audit seeks to give residents an opportunity to have their voices be heard, and prioritizes effective collaboration between neighbourhoods and other aspects of the community. The recommendations presented in this report are based on the needs of neighbourhood residents, and are intended to work towards effective, long-term interventions to address issues of safety and crime. Safety Audits are a tool that can greatly contribute to safer and healthier neighbourhoods in Nanaimo.

## Background

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The Newcastle neighbourhood of Nanaimo was one of six locations selected to be the site of a safety audit. For a variety of reasons, it was concluded that the Neighbourhood Safety Audit project could benefit this neighbourhood by helping to address safety issues, strengthen social cohesion, and promote positive change.

Newcastle residents showed a high level of interest in the safety audit initiative, and were enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate in the project. Members of this neighbourhood had also demonstrated a strong investment in the safety of their community, and had expressed concerns about neighbourhood safety and crime to the project team and members of the RCMP. This was a key factor in the decision to conduct a safety audit in the Newcastle neighbourhood, as strong collaboration between residents and the project team was central to the Neighbourhood Safety Audit project.

The strong neighbourhood association present in the Newcastle neighbourhood also factored in the choice to conduct a safety audit at this location. The Members of the Newcastle Community Association was a valuable working partner in the crafting of the Newcastle audit, advising the project team on the best ways to engage the neighbourhood, and the issues that were most relevant to residents. In addition, findings from the association's November 2020 ReImagine Nanaimo Outreach Meeting Report (City of Nanaimo, 2020) also guided the efforts of the safety audit. In the report, it was noted that residents were highly concerned about the homelessness crisis in the neighbourhood, and associated issues of safety and crime. Beyond this, improving the overall safety and security of the neighbourhood was listed as a top priority.

These factors made it clear that the Newcastle neighbourhood was an appropriate choice for a safety audit. This information was valuable in tailoring the focus of the audit to best address the needs of this neighbourhood.

## Pre-Audit Survey Results

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The results of the pre-audit survey distributed to Newcastle residents provided valuable insight into the perceptions and experiences of the neighbourhood's members. In total, 59 individuals responded to the survey. Their responses guided efforts in the Newcastle safety audit and informed recommendations for interventions.

In general, Newcastle residents showed a high overall opinion of their neighbourhood. 79% of respondents stated they felt a strong or very strong sense of belonging to the neighbourhood, and the

same percentage said they would recommend the area to others. 83% of respondents stated they rarely or never felt out of place due to personal characteristics such as ethnic identity, religion, or language. 96% of the sample reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with their relationship with friends and family, and 88% stated this about their relationships with neighbours. In addition, respondents demonstrated a high overall level of trust for neighbours, work colleagues, and local businesses.

Despite these generally positive perceptions held by Newcastle respondents, it is clear from the survey data that there is some concern about crime and neighbourhood safety among these residents. 64% of the sample stated they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their personal safety in the neighbourhood, 84% believed that crime had become more common in recent years, and 53% believed that crime occurred more frequently in their neighbourhood than it did in other neighbourhood. Furthermore, 24% of the sample reported feeling unsafe or very unsafe walking alone during the day, and 64% felt unsafe or very unsafe walking alone at night. Half of the sample believed it was likely or very likely that they would be the victim of a burglary at some point within the next year, 46% thought it was likely they would be robbed, and 61% believed it was likely they would be harassed in some way within the next twelve months. These figures suggest that at least half of the survey respondents are very concerned about their personal safety, and that they experience a high degree of fear of crime.

In regards to the reasoning for why respondents answered the ways that they did, a wide range of responses were offered. Many respondents pointed to the presence of homeless individuals in the neighbourhood as a major reason for feeling unsafe, as well as individuals who use drugs or suffer from mental health disorders. Many residents associated these people with criminal activity and decreases in overall safety. A large number of survey respondents also identified property crime as a key reason for feeling unsafe. Many residents stated that they had been the victim of, or had witnessed such property crime incidents, which informed their beliefs regarding neighbourhood safety. The vast majority of respondents stated that they believed addressing these issues should be a top priority. Some respondents stated their belief that these issues should be addressed through policing and enforcement, while others argued for the wider implementation of treatment options for individuals in need, as well as community based crime prevention initiatives.

Newcastle survey respondents also answered questions relating to their demographic information. It was found that 66% of the sample was female, and 64% were above the age of 65. 95% of the sample identified their ethnic identity as Caucasian, with only one individual identifying as First Nations, and zero as a visible minority. 80% of respondents were born in Canada, and all but two of those who were not born in Canada had lived in the country for over 40 years. 50% of the sample reported an annual household income of \$75,000 or higher, and 61% stated they were retired.

The findings of the Newcastle pre-audit survey shed light on the perceptions and experiences of neighbourhood residents. This information then guided efforts during the planning and conducting of the Newcastle safety audit.

## Newcastle Safety Audit Summary

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On May 11<sup>th</sup> 2021 at 7 pm neighbourhood residents gathered to conduct a safety audit along a route that was identified through online survey and anecdotal sources as presenting community safety challenges. Due to COVID safety protocols, participation was limited to 10 participants.

The Newcastle Neighbourhood Safety Audit, had 7 neighbourhood residents participate. One criminology practicum student, the Community Policing Coordinator and the City of Nanaimo Social Planner. This Safety Audit also was fortunate to have the Newcastle Place Housing Manager from Island Crisis Care Society in attendance. The residents that participated represented other key groups in the neighbourhood, specifically, the Newcastle Neighbourhood Association, and several Block Watches. There was such a high demand to participate in the audit that those who could not attend due to space completed a mini audit checklist at a different day and time. We also had residents who participated in the group audit also do a mini audit check list during a different day of the week and in the very early morning hours to note any difference in activity that presented itself in the neighbourhood. In total we had 16 individuals participate in the Safety Audit and each followed the same route. The route chosen, as mentioned previously, was largely based on feedback from those living and working in the Newcastle Neighbourhood. The route included commercial hubs, trails/pathways and many residential areas. (See Appendix A for specific route information)

### *Dawes Street and Vancouver Avenue (Location #1)*

The Safety Audit began on Vancouver Avenue in which the residents provided their thoughts on the surrounding area. General impressions about this particular area was the change in business activity. There were references to a dead zone with the closure of anchoring businesses in the area. The gas station has been closed for several years due to a fire at the gas station. The Whitespot has closed permanently and many in the neighbourhood assume it was due to COVID and the negative activity happening in the area. This inactivity at these businesses has increased loitering activity.

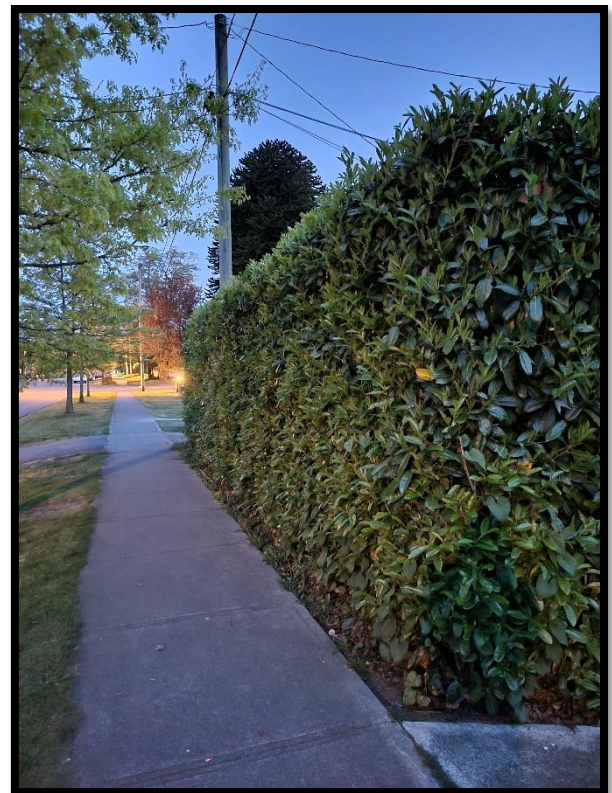
Audit participants also made special mention of some of the new apartment buildings in the area. They were concerned about the design of the parkades located in these newer buildings as they provided direct access into the parkade by non building residents. Many felt this increased the chance that vehicles would be targeted for theft and reports has shown that many unhoused individuals were accessing parkades for shelter.

### *Bryden Street and Vancouver Avenue (Location #2)*

Residents mentioned that there was a lot of activity in this intersection and the block of Brydon where Newcastle Place operates. Newcastle Place is a supportive housing site for marginalized citizens of the community. The activity specifically mentioned was the loitering outside across the street from Newcastle Place in the greenspace including the Baby Salsa parking lot. The area seems to be a visiting area for folks living at Newcastle Place and crowds tend to attract other crowds. The general policy of Newcastle Place is that they allow the gatherings in the greenspace across the street during the day time hours however will enforce movement from that area during evening hours. There was also mention to how helpful the security provided by Newcastle Place was to the neighbourhood. The security patrols an area from Townsite Road and Terminal Avenue south to the intersection of Terminal Avenue and Stewart Avenue. The housing operators and the security company will take requests and concerns from neighbours and will dispatch security to all parts of the neighbourhood when available. The neighbourhood recognizes the limits to the resources and capacity of the security company. The audit participants did also mention the property owners where baby Salsa is located had recently done some work to remove bushes and shrubs that were affecting visibility to the area.

### *Vancouver Avenue (Location #3)*

The Audit participants walked north down Vancouver Avenue towards Townsite. Participants shared their knowledge of the type of pedestrian travel utilized down this street. The residents along the street have become desensitized to some of the public disorder they witness. Many of them shared the similar experiences of particular individuals who travel along Vancouver Avenue that are often in distress. There are often individuals yelling, moaning and/or crying due to its regular occurrence many residents no longer call the police. Some residents made mention of incidents of intimate partner violence from couples who appear to be homeless. Many of the participants felt that Vancouver Avenue was used as a travel route from downtown, the Ravine, Newcastle Place to the Ravine and /or the Chinese Memorial park. There is only one sidewalk on Vancouver Avenue and many of the seniors in the area do not feel comfortable walking around the neighbourhood. They cite that there are often shopping carts as physical barriers on the sidewalks or they feel fearful to walk by someone who appears to be in a drug psychosis or a mental health crisis due to the unpredictability of their behaviour.



Finally, the audit participants mentioned the work that many residents do to keep their property secure, for example, installing cameras and that visibility does not seem to be a deterrent to the thefts or break-ins in the neighbourhood experiences. Many of the apartment buildings along Vancouver Avenue have had to make physical alterations to their property by adding fencing to control access points or secure garbage bins to avoid rummaging or crimes of opportunity. There have been reports of a number of auto thefts and break-ins to ground level apartments. There are a few properties with landscaping that allow for drugs and/or stolen property to be stored and this has increased the negative activity the street has faced due to pickups for drugs or stolen property.

*Terminal Avenue and Townsite Road (Location #4)*

This seemed to be identified as a hot spot for criminal activity in the neighbourhood. The intersection is a commercial hub with businesses on 3 sides. There is a 7-11, Midland Tools, a Motel and the last corner contains a private residence. Audit participants shared anecdotal information about the thefts that are happening in and around Midland Tools and the extent that the owner has tried to secure the property. The 7-11 seemed to have the most challenges around negative activity. There is general neighbourhood knowledge that this site is where individuals can purchase drugs. There was a mattress and other garbage debris all dumped outside and around the 7-11 disposal bins. There was evidence of drug paraphernalia behind the 7-11 and human feces was noted along the back wall of the store. While conducting the audit, one alleged drug dealer identified by a few audit participants who had been kicked out of Newcastle Place approached the group in order to exchange angry words with the service provider of Newcastle Place. Finally, the residents noted that there were a lot of new faces at this store who appeared homeless but not familiar.

Many residents have reached out to 7-11 to inform the employees about the activity going on around the property but the response they have received from 7-11 has been unresponsive. The participants are concerned about the high school students who frequent the 7-11 and the impact this public disorder will have on their well-being. The discussion then followed on who to call when noting this negative activity was happening in their neighbourhood. The audit participants were confused on who to call, i.e. bylaw, police, and which circumstances they should call.

*Railroad Tracks and Caledonia Avenue (Location #5)*

Part of the audit route included the railroad tracks, as with other parts of the City, this section of the railway tracks is heavily used as a pathway for a diverse group of pedestrians. This current section of the railway connects with Caledonia Park and Bowen Park. Residents also indicated that this pathway was an important one for homeless individuals as it connects them with the shower program at Caledonia and the shelter on Townsite Road. Many individuals also shelter under the benches at the Football Field. There was evidence of debris including harm reduction supplies along the railway track and on the pathway leading to Caledonia Park. The area was also very dark and very challenging to navigate as the tracks and uneven pathway made it very tricky to walk on. Audit participants also commented on the recent fires and break-ins at the Hut at Caledonia Park.

*Millstone Bridge / German Cultural Centre (Location #6)*

This area of the route was very isolated and had very little activity. The landscaping in the area was very overgrown and the area was dark. There were people sleeping in the empty lot on the east side of Caledonia just before the Millstone River. The audit participants spoke about the work bylaw has been doing in the area and how the property owners have not done anything to maintain or safeguard the property. There were many pieces of graffiti on surfaces including road ways and the bridge surfaces. There were people taking shelter under the bridge while the audit was in progress. The trails leading up to the Millstone River Bridge had very overgrown landscape making visibility day or night very challenging. Residents indicated that this environment really encouraged tents to be set up without being seen by the general public. Residents generally avoid this area due to its lack of visibility and isolating factors.

*Mt. Benson Street (Location #7)*

Audit participants explained the history around an apartment block located at Caledonia Avenue and Mt. Benson Street. Historically, the building had struggled with drug activity, including selling and using on the property. The current property manager of the building has worked hard with its residents to improve safety on their property. They developed a block watch, hired private security and screened their residents. The neighbourhood at this particular site has seen a big improvement. There are still challenges in this area; recently the private security guard working on this apartment block was assaulted on the laneway between Caledonia Avenue and Terminal Avenue. Audit participants mention that they have seen many individuals walking through the area carrying weapons such as knives, machetes, and hammers. The particular laneway has also seen a few overdoses.

Other work happening on Mt. Benson has improved the area, this includes the work happening on the restaurant on the corner of Mt. Benson and Terminal Avenue. The restaurant had some struggles around public disorder on the property as well as several break ins in the past. They recently had a CPTED assessment and have incorporated the recommendations and have seen a drastic improvement.

*Terminal Avenue from Mt. Benson to Stewart Avenue (Location #8)*

Audit participants raised some concerns about the traffic safety of pedestrians walking along and crossing Terminal Avenue. It was pointed out that there are no crosswalks between Townsite Road and Stewart Avenue. Some participants mentioned that a high percentage of those crossing Terminal Avenue are under the influence of substances and have a hard time navigating the traffic. Traffic on Terminal Avenue is heavy and the sidewalk on the west side of Terminal Avenue is narrow and there is no buffer between pedestrians and the traffic travelling southbound. Audit Participants suggested a railing to prevent pedestrians straying into the traffic along Terminal Avenue. Finally, the participants mentioned that there are no audio prompts for those with visual impairments at the intersection of Terminal Avenue and Stewart Avenue. Reviewing ICBC's Vancouver Island Crash Maps, between 2016



and 2020, there have been 39 casualty and property damage only<sup>1</sup> crashes along the stretch of Terminal Avenue south of Townsite Road and Stewart Avenue<sup>2</sup> (Insurance Corporation of British Columbia, 2021).

Audit Participants have been very pleased with the improvements businesses have completed along this part of Terminal Avenue. Special mention was made about the motel in the area and that the new owners of the property have really improved their property and have been actively involved in the improvement of safety in the area.

Lots of discussion centred around the embankment for the Millstone River along Terminal Avenue and the access it was providing for individuals to camp along a very sensitive ecological area. There are concerns that with the camping activity and the structural changes happening on the trails leading up to the embankment that the whole entire side of the Millstone River may collapse into the river itself. There are make shift stairs that have been dug into the side of the embankment and many items such as propane tanks have been brought into this area for camping purposes. The area is very hard for emergency services such as fire, police or bylaw to access. There was a recent propane tank explosion in this area highlighting the safety concerns of the area.

#### *Other Observations and Comments*

General comments by most of the audit participants included a sense of frustration around the crime happening in the neighbourhood. They felt that the area had less crime prior to the supportive housing site becoming operational and that the supportive housing site and other City pressures have not contributed in a positive way to the neighbourhood. They also feel that the area is not patrolled very well by the RCMP. Some of the comments also included the idea that crime is committed in broad daylight because normal deterrents like being caught or being identified just doesn't apply to those individuals committing crimes in the Newcastle neighbourhood. The neighbourhood feels that the residents here are working really hard to secure and maintain their properties. Finally, audit participants did note that things seemed slightly better in the last 4-6 months. No real reasons were attributed by participants but the following was suggested as possible reasons, security, type of people moving in and out of the area, coordinated committees pulling agencies together, travel restrictions and COVID.

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<sup>1</sup> Casualty Crashes are crashes resulting in injury or fatality and property damage crashes are crashes resulting in material damage and no injury or fatality. 39 crashes incorporate both types of crashes

<sup>2</sup> The 39 crash incidents noted do not include crashes reported at the intersection of Townsite Road and Terminal Avenue or the intersection of Terminal Avenue and Stewart Avenue. Including these intersections would bring the crash number up to 127.

# Crime Statistics Summary

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The Uniformed Crime Reporting Survey (UCR) is a tool developed to measure the frequency at which various crimes and other activities occur in our communities. UCR data, when taken alongside other indicators, can provide valuable information to police, community organizations, and other agencies about the ways in which neighbourhoods are affected by crime. UCR statistics for the Newcastle neighbourhood were provided by the Nanaimo RCMP. The report contains measurements about the frequency of various incidents from January of 2016 to March of 2021. This information can offer useful insights into the experiences of Newcastle residents.

A sharp increase can be seen in the number of total incidents across the reporting period. A total of 80 incidents were reported in 2016, 103 in 2017, and 221 in 2018. This figure then jumped to 454 in 2019, and 452 in 2020. There were also 135 incidents between January and March of 2021. While these numbers are clearly demonstrative of an upwards trend, it should be acknowledged that they do not necessarily indicate an accurate increase in the frequency of actual crimes. This is because UCR data includes both incidents of actual criminal activity, as well as incidents in which a crime was only suspected to have happened. In addition, it should be noted that during the reporting period the UCR changed its methodology for categorizing incidents. As of January 2019 all incidents are considered to be “founded”, and as a result are included in the report, unless a police investigation has found credible evidence demonstrating that the incident in question did not happen, or was not attempted. This change was made to more effectively represent the needs of victims, and avoid excluding legitimate incidents because of a lack of evidence. Because of this change, many incidents that may have been excluded prior to the change are now far more likely to be included in the report.

The categories of incidents that saw the largest increase were Other General Occurrences (Other GO<sup>3</sup>) and Suspicious Occurrences (SO). A total of 41 Other GO incidents were reported between 2016 and 2018, but 98 were reported in 2019, and 123 in 2020. Similarly, 94% of SO incidents reported occurred in 2019 and 2020. This sharp increase is likely attributable to changes in UCR categorization methodology, and may not represent an increase in the actual number of such incidents. There was also a notable increase in the number of reported municipal bylaw violations. This spike may be the result of changes to the ways in which these incidents are classified by the UCR, as well as the willingness of residents and businesses to now report such incidents to police.

Incidents of Mischief to Property, and Incidents Causing Disturbances occurred relatively frequently across the 5 year reporting window, with incidents occurring more often in the last 2 years. 57% of

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<sup>3</sup> Other General Occurrences include reports that pertain to Well-Being Checks, the Trespass Act, the Quarantine Act, Lost Property, the Safe Streets Act, etc

property mischief incidents were reported in 2019 and 2020, and 63% of incidents causing disturbance occurred during this time. Incidents of Theft under \$5000 became more common across the 5-year period, with 2 being reported in 2016, 3 in 2017, 7 in 2018, 9 in 2019, and 16 on 2020. Crimes such as Auto Theft, Break and Enters, and Theft from Vehicles occurred at a relatively constant rate across the reporting window, with no visible trends being present in the data.

NEWCASTLE	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	5year Trend	5year Average	Jan-Mar 2021
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>452</b>		<b>262</b>	<b>135</b>
ARSON	0	1	0	6	2		2	0
AUTO THEFT	3	6	7	1	3		4	0
BIKE THEFT	8	3	2	3	2		4	0
BREAK & ENTER - BUS	2	2	1	4	4		3	1
BREAK & ENTER - OTH	1	1	1	0	2		1	0
BREAK & ENTER - RES	0	1	1	3	2		1	0
CAUSE DISTURBANCE	17	16	22	38	57		30	21
COUNTERFEIT CURRENCY	0	0	0	0	1		0	1
FRAUDS	6	1	22	21	11		12	3
MISCHIEF TO PROPERTY	16	34	25	53	46		35	18
MUNICIPAL BYLAW	1	1	20	73	43		28	9
OTHER GO	3	3	35	98	123		52	29
OTHER THEFT O/5000	1	0	0	0	1		0	0
OTHER THEFT U/5000	2	3	7	9	16		7	2
POSSESS STOLEN PROPERTY	0	1	1	6	1		2	1
ROBBERY	0	0	2	0	3		1	1
SHOPLIFTING	4	7	10	10	24		11	5
SUSPICIOUS OCCURRENCES	1	0	12	105	101		44	38
THEFT FROM MAIL	0	1	0	1	0		0	0
THEFT FROM VEHICLE	15	23	53	22	10		25	6
TRESPASS AT NIGHT	0	0	0	1	0		0	0

## Crime Prevention and Community Safety Recommendations

The purpose of the Neighbourhood Safety Audits is to support local neighbourhoods in building resiliency and increase safety. Work is done by activating the neighbourhood by capturing their real lived experiences through tools such as the pre audit survey, the group audits and/or self-directed audits. Engagement of the neighbourhood is important to help co create safety and connect agencies

that can provide support in developing and carrying out community safety initiatives or appropriate crime prevention activities.

Crime and community safety issues are complex and are often a symptom of a lack of access to the social determinants of health for not only individuals but neighbourhoods and communities. The root causes of crime are often the results of adverse social, economic, cultural and family conditions (Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council, 1996). The recommendations made here are suggestions on activities that neighbourhoods can do to contribute to the overall safety and security of the neighbourhood. They do not guarantee that crime will never happen as a result of implementing these recommendations nor will the following recommendations solve complex problems such as homelessness, the opioid crisis or the lack of resources around mental health services.

*Newcastle Neighbourhood Recommendations:*

1. Newcastle Neighbourhood has a Neighbourhood Association and several block watches set up. This has allowed a network of neighbours to evolve into somewhat intricate network. This has supported the creation of a Facebook Group page that allows for the communication of neighbourhood events and alerts that relate to safety and other news pertinent to the residents of Newcastle Neighbourhood. Having relationships with neighbours is a positive indicator for increasing neighbourhood safety. This tightly knit network can be used as a resource to improve conditions in neighbourhood. It will be important to sustain this work especially as people move in and out of the neighbourhood. Consider hosting block or work parties several times a year in areas of the neighbourhood that might need some clean up or beautification. These types of events also support relationship building between residents and can reach other residents who are not currently involved in neighbourhood through the association or block watches. There are several options that may cover the costs, for instance, the City of Nanaimo often provides social planning grants that support projects that build resiliency and social connectivity. The Nanaimo Foundation also provides Neighbourhood grants to help build safer communities. These grants can cover supplies and food for event. Community Policing can provide the support of additional volunteers to help with painting and/or garbage pickup. Always ensure you have the permission of the property owner prior to conducting any clean up events or block parties. It's always a good idea to reach out to the municipality to let them know about your plan and if there is any protocols or regulations that might apply to the area you are looking to clean up or host your block party at.
2. Actively encourage new block watches in the neighbourhood. Invite Cst. Gary O'Brien to annual Neighbourhood Association meetings to promote and support the implementations of new block watches within the neighbourhood.
3. Reach out to the operators of the 7-11 on Terminal with the support of the Community Policing Services to inform them of the community safety context of the neighbourhood and encourage a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessment on their property. Crime

Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) incorporates a set of strategies that help to reduce the opportunities to commit crimes, reduce the fear of crime, and prevents negative activity by replacing it with generators of positive activity (International CPTED Association, 2020). CPTED is grounded in practical and theoretical knowledge primarily from the fields of criminology, sociology, psychology, and architectural design. Community Policing can provide this assessment free of charge.

4. Knowledge around who to call and when to call to report criminal or nuisance activity is very helpful in proactively addressing safety issues. Reporting all incidents of suspicious, criminal or nuisance activity help to bring awareness to the problems happening in the neighbourhood and can directly protect family, neighbours and business owners. Many individuals hesitate to call the police or the local municipality out of fear of getting involved, sounding overly suspicious, taking up scarce resources or they may fear being identified. Only residents in a neighbourhood know who or what stands out in your neighbourhood so this is a critical part of crime prevention. There are several ways and points of contacts to make reports so this can be confusing to residents. It is encouraged that all residents in the Newcastle Neighbourhood receive the appropriate information via digital or physical resources. Community Policing Services can work with the City of Nanaimo to deliver the “Who to Call and When to Call” pamphlets to residents. Information can also be shared around what types of details are needed to share with departments such as police, bylaw, sanitation, at Neighbourhood Association meetings.
5. Feedback collected online, during the Audit and through review of the crime statistics, findings indicate that much of the crime happening in the area are crimes of opportunities. Often offenders will choose easy targets that offer rewards with little risk. This has a higher tendency to happen on thoroughfares that people use to get from point A to point B. Vancouver Avenue is used heavily as a transportation route. It is recommended that residents along Vancouver Avenue learn ways to reducing these opportunities for offenders by implementing CPTED Strategies on their property. This can include making improvements to landscaping that will help to curb the stashing of drugs and/or stolen materials. Community Policing Services can provide resources to conduct Home Security Checks to improve safety and security. It is also recommended to do some Auto Theft Awareness in the neighbourhood since there are some reports of Auto Thefts and Thefts from vehicles although this seems to be on a downward trend.
6. Community Policing will implement regular Crime Watch patrols throughout the Newcastle Neighbourhood to increase their presence and provide additional “eyes” and “ears” for the neighbourhood. Crime Watch Patrols will focus on the areas noted most problematic, along Caledonia Avenue into the Millstone River/German Cultural Centre Parking Lot, Vancouver Avenue between St. George Street and Dawes Street, and including Townsite Road. The Community Policing Volunteer Program hosts almost 50 dedicated and caring volunteers. They report all suspicious, criminal and nuisance behaviour they observe. Patrol teams are trained to

keep notes and maintain contact with RCMP dispatch, City Bylaws and City Sanitation as needed via cell phone and GIS Mapping systems.

7. Many nonprofit organizations offering services to our most marginalized individuals are very interested in building relationships with residents and businesses. After all they are providing service in the neighbourhood and many of the clients they serve are residents of the neighbourhood. Residents living in supported living or housing sites also care about the neighbourhood they live in. This was apparent during the Safety Audit Walk when a resident living at Newcastle Place showed concern for a gathering that was taking place in his neighbourhood and during COVID. Relationship building between groups in the neighbourhood such as neighbourhood associations, block watches, shelter organizations and businesses are important, by sharing different perspectives on what challenges people are facing in their neighbourhood. These challenges are better addressed when neighbourhoods on a whole are working collaboratively. Continue having inclusive meetings with nonprofit agencies, businesses and residents in the neighbourhood. Invite all parties to neighbourhood association meetings or block parties or other neighbourhood events. Best practices show that when marginalized individuals living in a neighbourhood have a sense of belonging they are more likely to contribute to the neighbourhood in positive ways. Community Policing or the Social Planners located with the City of Nanaimo can help provide linkages between nonprofit agencies and neighbourhoods where support is needed.

#### *Opportunities for Change:*

1. As mentioned, pedestrian safety is a concern along Terminal Avenue especially for pedestrians travelling south on Terminal Avenue or looking to cross Terminal Avenue between Townsite Road and Stewart Avenue. Linkages to the City of Nanaimo and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure will be important to create proactive structural change in the Newcastle Neighbourhood. This Neighbourhood Safety Audit Report will be shared at the Nanaimo Road Safety Committee where local and provincial agencies are involved in traffic safety are represented to help inform any initiatives they may be working on.
2. A common challenge plaguing urban centres and mid-size cities like Nanaimo are the number of vacant properties popping up. Vacant properties in neighbourhoods can create financial strain through a variety of ways, decreased tax revenue, maintenance costs, and costs through increased safety and crime issues (Mallach, 2018). Vacant lots also create a blight in a neighbourhood often lowering the value of properties nearby. This phenomenon now coined Hyper-Vacancy<sup>4</sup> correlates in neighbourhoods with concentrated poverty, unemployment and

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<sup>4</sup> Defined in a submission by Alan Mallach where neighbourhoods have vacant buildings or lots comprising more than 20% of the building stock. (Mallach, 2018)

health problems. Vacant lands or buildings are often associated with physical disorder, and ties true to the Broken Window Theory<sup>5</sup>, vacant lots indicate a lack of control within neighbourhoods and these types of environments are subject to criminal activity, prostitution, drug use and the sale of drugs. Being a well-developed neighbourhood, there are not a high number of empty lots in the Newcastle Neighbourhood however the empty lot at the end of Caledonia has been identified as a safety challenge. Nestled up along the Millstone River and forested areas, the overgrown landscaping has contributed to the lack of surveillance, visibility and overall safety of the area. This area in particular has been identified as a past hot spot for theft from properties nearby, theft from vehicles and mischief. The area contains lots of garbage, debris and graffiti. Considering the type of activity happening in this area and the overgrown landscaping there is a real concern for fires. This area directly links to the embankment along Millstone River (parallel to Terminal Avenue) identified in the audits to have camping activity where there have been recent reports of a propane tank explosion. There are several cities across Canada and in the United States where municipalities are looking for ways to address these vacant lots. Municipalities and neighbourhoods have created pocket parks, food forests, or created affordable housing and shelter options through expropriation and Use It or Lose It type bylaws (Mallach, 2018). More utilization of the City of Nanaimo's current Property Maintenance Bylaw and the Nuisance Abatement and Cost Recovery Bylaw may help to further engage property owners to maintain and manage properties better or be charged the costs for the City to attend and clean up properties. A closer look needs to be taken at vacant lots and how policy and planning can help revitalize neighbourhoods and move them away from a tipping point. *\*note solutions are currently being explored by the City of Nanaimo to address the safety challenges posed by the embankment between the Millstone River and Terminal Avenue including blocking off access to the embankment. This may influence activity on the vacant lot along Caledonia.*

3. Another large concern of the Newcastle Neighbourhood is the public disorder correlated with the drug, mental health and homelessness crisis. Police statistics show an increase in public disorder type events, for instance, there is an increase in General Occurrence type events which includes infringements on the Trespass Act, Quarantine Act, lost property events, Safe Street Act, etc. It is important to note that as mentioned previously the coding and reporting of police statistics changed in January 2019 which accounts for some of the increase however the sheer number of General Occurrence events warrants mention. This can also be said with the number of Suspicious Occurrence events. Many residents are concerned with the lack of housing, and

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<sup>5</sup> The Broken Window Theory, defined by social scientists James Wilson and George Kelling in 1982, as any visible sign of disorder in a neighbourhood will encourage further disorder and misbehaviour leading to more serious community safety issues. The more the space is in disarray the more the message is sent that no one cares for the space and therefore the space is "free" for the taking. For instance, in high crime neighbourhoods in Philadelphia there was an initiative to repair abandoned properties and transform vacant lots into community parks which subsequently saw the reduction of gun violence by 39% (Psychology Today, 2021)

support services for individuals with mental health and addictions issues. The public disorder causes fear among the residents and many are worried that the lack of housing and the pressures of moving homeless individuals from one location to another in the downtown area will put additional pressures on the surrounding neighbourhoods. Linkages and collaboration between neighbourhoods and the Nanaimo Homeless Coalition will be key to get the community support and resources the Task Force may need to carry out their Action Plan. Partnerships such as these also help to tackle stigma and correct any harmful myths with evidence based research on what is working to address homelessness and our current drug and mental health crisis’.

## Summary

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The Newcastle Neighbourhood is one of the older neighbourhoods in Nanaimo with lovely historical character. The neighbourhood is situated between many vital hubs in the city which allows for easy access to vital services for most of the neighbourhood’s residents. There are recreational parks, walkways and beaches within walking distance. Newcastle Neighbourhood’s proximity to downtown and major transportation hubs means more transient people move through the neighbourhood as walk, cycle or drive between destination points. The Neighbourhood is working hard to keep the neighbourhood a welcoming, clean, beautiful and safe space. The residents’ commitment and dedication to safety and wellbeing to their neighbourhood is apparent through the networks they have built with one another and their willingness to get involved. Nanaimo Community Policing Program is looking forward to supporting the residents of Newcastle Neighbourhood in this work. It will be very beneficial to revisit the Newcastle Neighbourhood again in 2 to 3 years to see what crime prevention programs have been implemented and what positive impacts have been made in the neighbourhood.



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# Appendix A

## Newcastle Neighbourhood Route Map

~Start and Finish at the Corner of Dawes Street and Vancouver Ave

- 1) Head North on Vancouver Ave until Bryden Street (Stop 1)
- 2) Continue up Vancouver Ave until Townsite Road (Stop 2)
- 3) Head West on Townsite Road until 7-11 parking lot (Stop 3)
- 4) Continue down Townsite Road until the train tracks. Head south on the train tracks until Rosehill Street. Turn Right on Caledonia Ave. (Stop 4)
- 5) Walk down Calendonía Street to where it meets up with Millstone River (Stop 5)
- 6) Return back on Calendonía to Mt. Benson Road and then head north on Terminal Ave to Townsite. Cross East on Townsite and then go south on Terminal Ave until Rosehill (Stop 6 at Midland @Rosehill)
- 7) Head south on Terminal until Bryden Street, turn left and walk to Vancouver Ave. Turn right on Vancouver to finish at Vancouver Ave and Dawes Street.

