

2021 July 5

TO: Mayor Nenshi and Members of Council
FROM: Kay Choi, A/Director, Calgary Community Standards
RE: **Administrative Inquiry – Panhandling**

This memo responds to the 2019 December 16 Administrative Inquiry submitted by Mayor Nenshi and includes responses to the following questions:

1. What actions are Administration taking (both in terms of enforcement and education) to respond to the significant increase in panhandling activity in our city, particularly from motor vehicles, contravening Section 5 of the Panhandling Bylaw, 3M99? Can we do more education on what is and is not legal?
 2. Is Administration aware of any accidents or injuries related to panhandling from vehicles on Calgary roads?
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What actions are Administration taking (both in terms of enforcement and education) to respond to the significant increase in panhandling activity in our city, particularly from motor vehicles, contravening Section 5 of the Panhandling Bylaw, 3M99?

Administration recognizes the significant safety concerns associated with panhandling from motor vehicles – including the potential for pedestrian-vehicle collisions and distracted driving – and are taking steps to protect individuals who engage in panhandling, along with motorists.

The Panhandling Bylaw 3M99 prohibits the practice of panhandling from a person who is an occupant of a motor vehicle. However, addressing panhandling through violation tickets has not proven to be a significant deterrent, particularly for individuals who have repeatedly been found in violation of the bylaw.

Panhandling is often driven by vulnerabilities such as poverty, homelessness, and mental health and addictions issues. City enforcement partners try to facilitate connections with social service agencies in Calgary that not only help individuals meet immediate needs for food, shelter and medical attention, but also provide long-term support in overcoming barriers to health, housing and employment.

Court diversion programs which connect individuals with programs and services as an opportunity to have charges withdrawn are also being targeted to individuals who engage in frequent panhandling. Operation Hand Up was launched by Calgary Police Service in 2019 with the support of Alberta Health Services with the goal of breaking the cycle of panhandling at the individual level and reducing the number of calls for service for panhandling overall. When an officer responds to an individual panhandling, they issue an offence notice and contact the Municipal Prosecutor to determine whether the individual meets the criteria for diversion. If the individual is a suitable candidate, they are diverted to appropriate Alberta Health Services programs in lieu of a fine when they attend court. Of the individuals who have entered the diversion program, none have received further violation tickets for panhandling.



Administration acknowledges the public interest in resolving chronic panhandling from motorists and is committed to addressing concerns through a combination of proactive patrols of known hot spots and a timely response to calls for service.

Can we do more education on what is and is not legal?

Efforts have been underway since 2011 to educate Calgary motorists on alternatives to providing donations to individuals who engage in panhandling with the introduction of Calgary's Road Home program. This partnership between Calgary Parking Authority, Calgary Homeless Foundation and Calgary Food Bank aims to redirect money given to panhandlers to social service agencies that provide critical resources and supports for mental health, addictions or other barriers to well-being. Donations are collected from motorists using curbside ParkPlus pay machines and ParkPlus cell phone accounts. Calgary Community Standards will engage with Calgary Parking Authority regarding whether this program continues to meet the necessary outcomes and to list lessons learned.

In 2021 March, Administration explored the feasibility of expanding this messaging through a comprehensive public awareness campaign focused on informing Calgarians that they can more safely and effectively help by donating funds to social service agencies that provide a more holistic approach to addressing underlying vulnerabilities. Administration identified a number of risks with proceeding with the campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic, most notably the outbreak control measures in place at some shelters and congregate living facilities and the reluctance of individuals to attend these locations due to fears of disease transmission. Given the potential unintended impact of the campaign on the ability of individuals panhandling to meet their basic needs, the decision was made to not proceed at this time.

Recognizing that increased enforcement is often perceived by the public as criminalizing poverty and homelessness, Administration will continue to pursue options and opportunities to use education to tackle the complex issue of panhandling.

Is Administration aware of any accidents or injuries related to panhandling from vehicle on Calgary roads?

The Panhandling Bylaw 3M99 specifically prohibits panhandling from motor vehicles due to the dangerous nature of this practice. Administration is aware of two incidents involving individuals panhandling that resulted in injury or fatality.

On 2019 March 16, an individual was fatally struck at the intersection of Macleod Trail and Southland Dr. SW. On 2019 October 13, an individual was struck by a motor vehicle at the intersection of Macleod Trail and Glenmore Trail SW resulting in critical injuries. Administration will continue to manage and respond to panhandling using education and enforcement, where appropriate, and will continue to use proactive strategies, such as regular patrols of common locations for panhandling, in an effort to prevent future accidents and injuries in the future.

Calgary



Should you have any further questions on this topic, please contact Kay Choi, A/Director, Calgary Community Standards, or Barb Doyscher, A/Manager of Strategic Services, Calgary Community Standards.