

Community Services Report to
Community Development Committee
2025 June 12

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
CD2025-0510

Public Behaviour Bylaw – Weapons Provision

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to recommend amendments to the Public Behaviour Bylaw 54M2006 to prohibit the open display of any item that can be used as a weapon or any noxious substance in any public place, with exemptions for activities approved under applicable City of Calgary business licences, permits, or special event requirements.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

On 2024 October 29, during the Transit Bylaw 4M81 Review (Report CD2024-0944) at the Regular Meeting of Council, Administration committed to reviewing the weapons provision in the Public Behaviour Bylaw. This commitment was made in response to enforcement gaps and growing public safety concerns identified by both Administration and the Calgary Police Service, particularly regarding the use of bear spray in assaults and robberies. Background and Previous Council Direction can be found in Attachment 1.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Community Development Committee recommends that Council give three readings to the proposed bylaw, in Attachment 2, to amend the Public Behaviour Bylaw 54M2006.

RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE, 2025 JUNE 12:

That Council give three readings to the **Proposed Bylaw 33M2025**, in Attachment 2, to amend the Public Behaviour Bylaw 54M2006.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

GM Katie Black concurs with the contents of this report.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Proposed amendments to Public Behaviour Bylaw 54M2006 would prohibit the open display of a weapon or any noxious substance, such as bear spray, in any public place, unless for a lawful purpose.
- Defines "weapon" and "noxious substance" to align with the Transit Bylaw 4M81.
- Aligns enforcement practices across all public places with express or implied access, addressing gaps outside Calgary Transit property.
- Introduces specified penalties to reinforce the seriousness of unsafe behaviour in public spaces.
- Supports early intervention by officers, while maintaining a commitment to connect individuals with social supports where appropriate, promoting safer and welcoming spaces for all Calgarians.

Public Behaviour Bylaw – Weapons Provision

DISCUSSION

The Calgary Police Service's report to the Calgary Police Commission: Response to Bear Spray Usage (2024 November 15) highlighted growing public safety concerns related to bear spray, particularly in downtown areas, where it is frequently used in assaults and robberies. Seizures of bear spray reached their peak in 2023, with many instances involving individuals carrying expired or improperly handled canisters. While previous prevention efforts led to a temporary reduction in incidents, the usage of bear spray in criminal activities rose again, remaining above the five-year average into early 2024.

Since the amendment of the Transit Bylaw 4M81 (47M2024, 2024 October 29), The City has prohibited the visible display of weapons and noxious substances on Transit property, including stations, vehicles and transit ways. However, that bylaw's authority does not extend to other public spaces, where only the Public Behaviour Bylaw applies.

The proposed amendments to the Public Behaviour Bylaw address situations where an item is displayed in a way that causes fear but does not constitute a criminal offence. These amendments would enable officers to intervene in concerning situations that currently fall outside existing enforcement authority. Developed with considerations for the diverse needs of people using public spaces, the amendments are intended to provide an opportunity to intervene before a situation escalates to threatening behaviour. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) would guide implementation to ensure enforcement is mindful of both equity-deserving individuals and members of the public more generally.

The proposed bylaw amendments address this gap by:

- Prohibiting the open display of weapons and noxious substances in any place where the public has express or implied access, allowing officers to intervene before escalation occurs;
- Defining "weapon" and "noxious substance" broadly to support enforcement;
- Including lawful exemptions for activities approved under applicable City of Calgary business licences, permits, or special event requirements, such as festivals, parades, and other organized community events.

Similar approaches are being explored in other Canadian municipalities through updated bylaws that restrict the open display or use of weapons, including bear spray and other noxious substances, in public spaces. These updates reflect a growing interest in enhancing public safety through behaviour-focused regulation in urban areas, though the trend may not be uniform across all jurisdictions.

The amendments are designed to regulate behaviour, not possession, ensuring The City's approach remains within the municipal authority to regulate for public safety under the Municipal Government Act and remains consistent with the Criminal Code of Canada. Legal review confirmed The City's jurisdiction and the legal clarity of the proposed enforcement provisions.

Through internal cross-departmental collaboration on the regulations, Administration refined the bylaw language and confirmed the importance of exemptions for activities approved under applicable City of Calgary business licences, permits, or special event requirements. Key departments emphasized the need for clear enforcement tools that promote public safety while respecting equity considerations.

Community Services Report to
Community Development Committee
2025 June 12

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
CD2025-0510

Public Behaviour Bylaw – Weapons Provision

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed | <input type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required |

The Calgary Police Service provided data and input on trends, enforcement needs, and the potential impacts of the proposed amendments.

Community-based organizations with direct experience supporting people experiencing vulnerabilities, particularly in the downtown core, were consulted. They provided insight into the impacts of weapons and noxious substances in public spaces. Feedback emphasized the need for context-aware enforcement, protections for individuals experiencing vulnerabilities, and education-first approaches, all of which will inform SOP development.

Feedback from these external partners helped refine the scope of the bylaw, clarify exemptions, and inform enforcement strategies that aim to balance public safety with equity considerations.

IMPLICATIONS

Social

The proposed amendments support The City of Calgary's ongoing commitment to public safety and equitable access to public spaces. By enabling earlier officer intervention when weapons or noxious substances are visibly displayed, the amendments aim to prevent incidents before they occur and contribute to maintaining safe and welcoming public environments for all Calgarians.

Environmental

Not Applicable.

Economic

The proposed amendments support Calgary's economic resilience by supporting safer, more welcoming public spaces. A vibrant public realm encourages business activity, supports street-level commerce, and attracts investment—key elements in creating a strong, diverse economy and fostering a prosperous city.

Service and Financial Implications

No anticipated financial impact

Approval of the proposed bylaw amendments is not expected to impact the operating budget. Any associated costs can be managed within the existing budgets of the Emergency Management and Community Safety business unit and the Calgary Police Service.

RISK

If Council does not approve the proposed bylaw amendments, officers may continue to face limitations in responding to visible weapons and noxious substances, such as bear spray, in public spaces. This could increase the risk of these items being used to cause harm, or

Community Services Report to
Community Development Committee
2025 June 12

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
CD2025-0510

Public Behaviour Bylaw – Weapons Provision

displayed in a way that causes intimidation or makes others feel unsafe, further escalating public safety concerns and diminishing public confidence in The City's ability to proactively manage emerging safety risks.

If Council approves the amendments, there may be public and media attention on enforcement practices, particularly as they relate to individuals experiencing vulnerabilities. Administration will minimize this risk by developing clear enforcement protocols and public education materials to ensure consistent and equitable application.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Background and Previous Council Direction
- 2. Proposed Bylaw 33M2025**
3. Jurisdictional Scan
4. Presentation

Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Katie Black	Community Services	Approve
Iain Bushell	Emergency Management and Community Safety	Approve
Erendira Cervantes-Altamirano	Community Strategies	Consult
Jill Floen	City Solicitor, Law Department	Consult

Author: Afshan Nazir, Business Strategist, Policy and Bylaw Development - Community Strategies

City Clerks: A. Gagliardi / A. de Grood