



CITY OF  
*Lethbridge*



CITY OF LETHBRIDGE

# COMMUNITY SAFETY ENGAGEMENT What We Heard Report

VERSION #1

FEBRUARY 2024

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

### PROJECT SUMMARY & BACKGROUND

The City of Lethbridge (“the City” or “Lethbridge”) engaged StrategyCorp – a strategic advisory firm – in November 2023 to help them advance their community safety, well-being, and inclusion work in light of their receipt of funding through the Government of Canada’s [Building Safer Communities Fund](#) (BSCF).

Through this project, the City sought to explore how new community-based initiatives could be implemented to prevent youth from participating in gun and gang activity, and how existing plans (e.g., the [Downtown Clean and Safe Strategy](#), the [Community Clean and Safe Strategy](#), etc.) could be updated to broaden their geographic reach and ensure they address recent community challenges. A key element of this work was a needs assessment focused on both general community safety and the experience of youth within the community specifically.

Concurrently, Lethbridge City Council approved a terms of reference for a Downtown Lawlessness Reduction (DLR) Task Force.<sup>1</sup> The Task Force is seeking to explore the root causes of “lawless behaviours” and their impact on the community and is currently gathering stakeholder feedback.<sup>2</sup> An opportunity was identified for the DLR Task Force to leverage learnings from the community safety needs assessment to inform its work (e.g., the identification of actionable initiatives to address community safety).

### ENGAGEMENT & RESEARCH

To inform the needs assessment, StrategyCorp conducted several research activities, including:

- A Community Safety Survey (1,704 total responses);
- A Youth Needs Assessment Survey (52 responses);
- 11 interviews with cross-sectoral representatives;
- 1 focus group with community agencies;
- 1 focus group with school division representatives;
- 2 Community Pop-Ups (i.e., informal in-person engagement opportunities); and
- An analysis of relevant Canadian Socio-economic Information Management System (CANSIM) data.

### DELIVERABLES/OUTCOMES

The City of Lethbridge requested that StrategyCorp create a high-level summary of needs assessment feedback related to the City’s downtown core.

<sup>1</sup> lethbridgenewsNOW - [Downtown Lawlessness Reduction Task Force officially operational in Lethbridge](#).

<sup>2</sup> Global News - [Combating lawlessness in downtown Lethbridge](#).

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## WHAT WE HEARD

### SUMMARY OF KEY THEMES

Throughout the stakeholder and community engagement completed as part of StrategyCorp’s work with the City of Lethbridge, the safety of the downtown core and the well-being of its inhabitants consistently emerged as a central focus. For example, in the Community Safety Survey, when asked if there are any parts of Lethbridge (e.g., certain neighbourhoods) that stand out as areas of concern or need special attention, 84% of survey participants said yes. Of those who said yes, approximately 80% (i.e., 4 out of 5) of individuals singled out downtown as a particularly pressing concern.

Several related themes emerged pertaining to community safety and well-being within Lethbridge’s downtown core through needs assessment research:

#### **THEME 1: COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PUBLIC SPACES**

Many residents feel unsafe in downtown Lethbridge, particularly in and around Galt Gardens. Concerns were raised about drug use, criminal activity, and a general sense of insecurity, especially after dark. There is unease in downtown public spaces for many individuals, with worries about vandalism, property theft, and overall disorderliness highlighted. Specifically, areas around the Lethbridge Shelter and Resource Centre and the Streets Alive Mission were called out as areas of heightened concern. Some community members advocated for increased efforts from the City to address safety issues downtown, including initiatives to improve lighting and visible surveillance infrastructure.

Some safety concerns reflect real crime trends in Lethbridge. For example, an analysis of CANSIM data indicated that theft rates in Lethbridge have been increasing since 2015. Theft rates are one of the most common property crime types in the City. Assault rates and theft from auto rates in Lethbridge have also been increasing significantly since 2014, while break and enter rates have increased significantly since 2018.

#### **THEME 2: HOMELESSNESS AND ADDICTION ISSUES**

Many residents in Lethbridge voiced concerns over the visibility of homelessness and individuals who are experiencing a mental health and / or addictions crisis, particularly in downtown areas and near shelters. These residents often connected the visibility of homelessness and mental health and / or addictions challenges with increased crime rates and safety risks. There's a strong desire amongst many residents for stricter measures against drug dealing and consumption to enhance safety, in addition to more robust support services (e.g., affordable housing and increased mental health and / or addictions supports).

#### **THEME 3: IMPACTS ON LOCAL BUSINESSES**

Safety concerns in downtown Lethbridge negatively affect local businesses, with many residents reluctant to visit Lethbridge’s downtown core due to safety issues, particularly around the downtown bus terminal and shopping areas. This avoidance of downtown has contributed to the closure of some businesses.



Owners cite vandalism, employee safety concerns, and declining customers as key reasons for shutting down operations. Despite a desire to support local businesses, many community members opt to avoid downtown altogether, negatively affecting local economic activity. In addition, reduced foot traffic downtown often exacerbates feelings of unease among individuals who need to visit the area, further contributing to a perceived lack of safety and further deterring potential customers from supporting local businesses.

#### **THEME 4: COMMUNITY INVESTMENT AND URBAN PLANNING**

Several respondents criticized the City's investment choices, suggesting that funds could be better used to address the root causes of safety concerns rather than aesthetic improvements or certain public infrastructure initiatives they view as unnecessary (e.g., downtown bike lanes). Some community members also expressed concerns about the placement of shelters and addictions services in residential areas and noted their desire for these facilities to be moved away from homes and businesses.

#### **THEME 5: POLICE PRESENCE AND RESPONSE**

Many residents expressed dissatisfaction with policing in downtown Lethbridge, and cited concerns about "inadequate law enforcement," slow response times, and a lack of visible police presence. However, the causes of this dissatisfaction varied. For example, while some community members advocated for an increased police presence, faster response times, and stricter law enforcement (i.e., getting tougher on crime), others advocated for an increased focus on crime prevention and the rehabilitation of individuals who have committed a crime.

#### **THEME 6: CLEAN STREETS, SIDEWALKS, AND PUBLIC FACILITIES**

The cleanliness of downtown streets, sidewalks, and public facilities significantly impacts many community members' sense of safety and security. Nearly 1 in 4 survey respondents identified unclean public spaces, including streets, sidewalks, and parks, as one of Lethbridge's most pressing safety and well-being concerns. The Clean Sweep Program was praised by several residents for enhancing their feelings of safety. Moreover, there is a desire among some residents for the program to expand further, with suggestions such as extending the hours of operation for the Needle Debris Collection Program to provide coverage in the afternoon.