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# City of Lethbridge – Building Safer Communities Fund

Community Safety Key  
Findings Report

April 2024





## DOCUMENT PURPOSE

The City of Lethbridge (“the City” or “Lethbridge”) is in the process of updating various plans and strategies aimed at creating an “inclusive and safe community where residents can access the social services and resources they need.”<sup>1</sup> One such plan is the City’s [Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy](#), which seeks to “inform and improve community wellbeing and safety in Lethbridge.”<sup>2</sup>

To inform the updating of the City’s Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy, the City has requested that StrategyCorp summarize key community safety findings from its research activities related to the City’s Building Safer Communities Fund (BSCF) project.

BSCF community safety research involved several activities, such as a Community Safety Survey, interviews with cross-sectoral representatives, focus groups with community agencies and school division representatives, and community pop-ups (i.e., informal in-person engagement opportunities).

This document provides an overview of key findings regarding community safety and perceptions of safety in Lethbridge. It also includes relevant recommendations from StrategyCorp’s BSCF Final Report. Information included within this document is intended to support Lethbridge in updating the City’s Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy.

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<sup>1</sup> City of Lethbridge, [Community Social Development Reports and Studies](#).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DOCUMENT PURPOSE .....	1
STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT .....	3
COMMUNITY SAFETY SURVEY FINDINGS OVERVIEW .....	4
Perceptions and Feelings of Safety .....	4
Time of Day and Areas of Concern .....	5
Priority Community Safety and Wellbeing Issues .....	6
Priority Community Safety and Wellbeing Improvement Opportunities .....	8
Awareness of Existing Community Safety and Wellbeing Initiatives .....	10
STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS OVERVIEW & COMMUNITY SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS .....	11
Theme #1: Enforcement .....	11
Stakeholder & Community Insights .....	11
Recommendations for Addressing Community Enforcement Needs .....	12
Theme #2: Security & Promotion .....	13
Stakeholder & Community Insights .....	13
Recommendations for Addressing Community Security & Promotion Needs .....	14
Theme #3: Outreach .....	14
Stakeholder & Community Insights .....	14
Recommendations for Addressing Community Outreach Needs .....	15
Theme #4: Cleaning .....	15
Stakeholder & Community Insights .....	15
Recommendations for Addressing Community Cleanliness Needs .....	16
Theme #5: Built Environment .....	17
Stakeholder & Community Insights .....	17
Recommendations for Addressing Built Environment Needs in the Community .....	17
Theme #6: Public Visibility of Vulnerable Populations .....	18
Stakeholder & Community Insights .....	18
Other Recommendations for Addressing Community Safety Needs .....	19

## STRUCTURE OF THIS DOCUMENT

First, this document presents key quantitative findings from the BSCF Community Safety Survey, which was launched in mid-December 2023 and closed in mid-January 2024. Survey results - gathered from a total of 1,704 responses - meet the threshold for statistical significance, maintaining an error rate of less than  $\pm 3\%$  based on a population of 106,550 (as per the 2023 municipal census).

Second, this document outlines key qualitative themes related to community safety that were identified through stakeholder and community input. Six key themes are identified that align with key elements of the City's [Downtown Clean & Safe Strategy](#) (i.e., enforcement, security and promotion, outreach, cleaning, built environment improvements), in addition to a seventh theme related to the visibility of vulnerable populations.

# COMMUNITY SAFETY SURVEY FINDINGS

## OVERVIEW

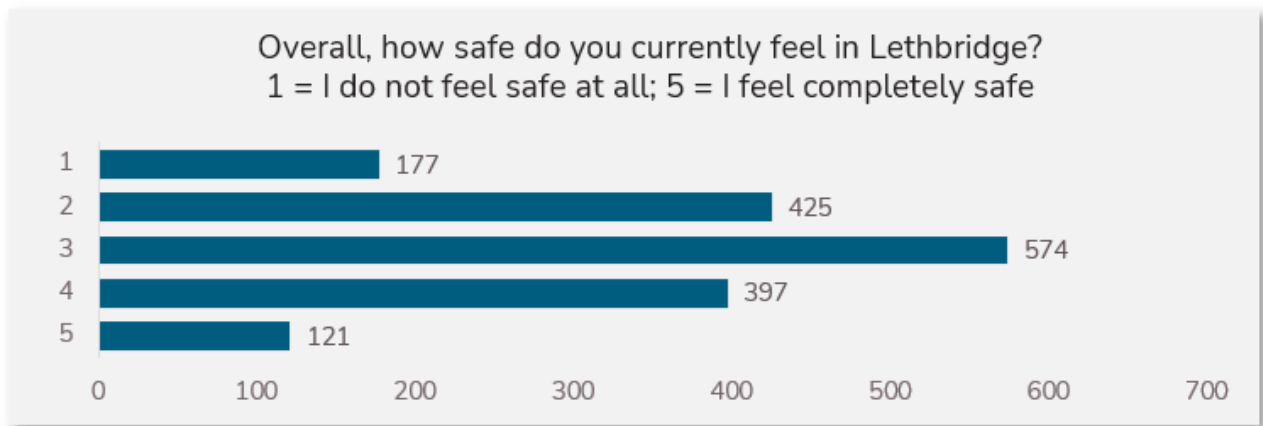
In the BSCF Community Safety Survey, participants were asked several questions regarding their feelings of safety and their perception of safety in Lethbridge. Key survey takeaways are included as follows.

### Perceptions and Feelings of Safety

Community members were asked how their feeling / perception of safety has changed in the past year. Options ranged from significantly improved to significantly worse. While many community members surveyed reported that their feeling / perception of safety has not changed over the last year, a notable 53% of participants indicated that their feeling / perception of safety has either somewhat or significantly worsened. By contrast, 7% of community members reported an improvement, whether somewhat or significantly, in their feeling / perception of safety over the past year. Results indicate that, overall, the feeling / perception of safety among most community members in Lethbridge has deteriorated recently.

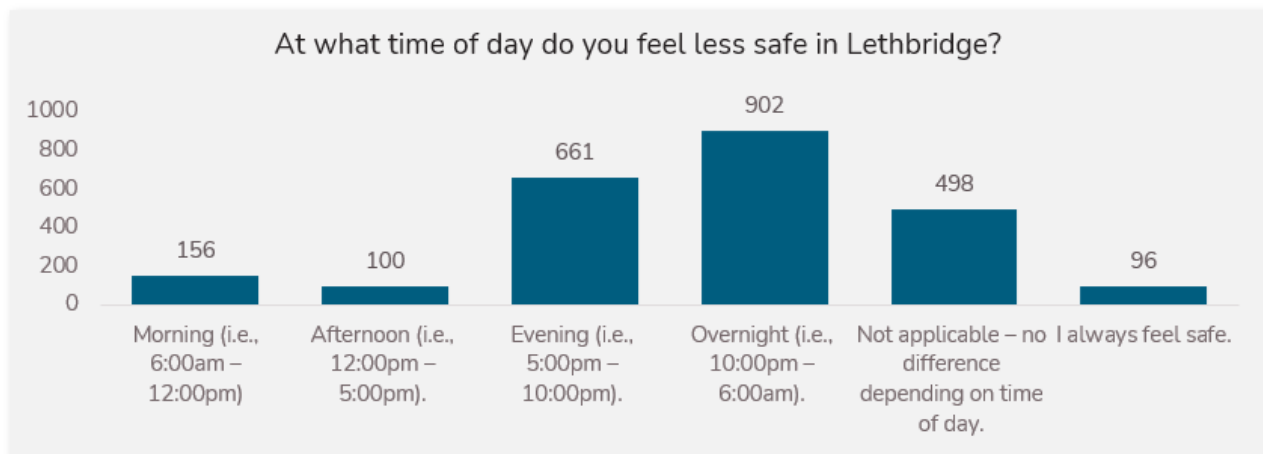


Community members were also asked to rank their feeling of safety in Lethbridge on a scale of 1 (i.e., I do not feel safe at all) to 5 (i.e., I feel completely safe). Most participants indicated that they do not feel a sense of absolute safety or complete insecurity in Lethbridge.

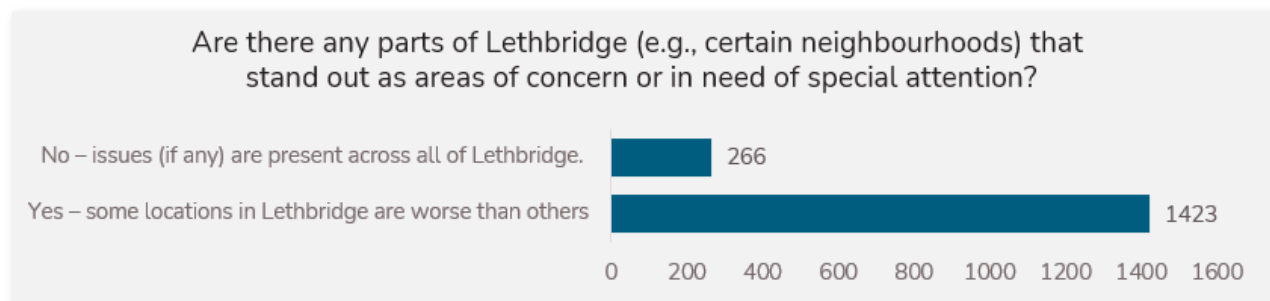


### Time of Day and Areas of Concern

To probe further on community members' feelings / perceptions of safety, participants were asked if they feel less safe in Lethbridge during different times of day. Options included the morning, afternoon, evening, and overnight. Participants were also given the option to select "no difference depending on time of day" and "I always feel safe." Overall, community members surveyed expressed a heightened sense of unease in the evening (i.e., 5:00pm – 10:00pm) and overnight (i.e., 10:00pm – 6:00am).



In addition to time of day, community members were also asked if they perceive specific neighbourhoods in Lethbridge as more concerning for community safety than others. 84% of survey participants identified certain neighbourhoods as areas of concern. In open-ended survey questions, downtown Lethbridge and the northside of the City were frequently mentioned by participants as areas in need of special attention. This feedback underscores the importance of targeted efforts and interventions in specific areas to enhance overall community safety and wellbeing.



### Priority Community Safety and Wellbeing Issues

To better understand specific community safety and wellbeing challenges in Lethbridge that contribute to negative feelings / perceptions of safety, survey participants were provided with a list of ~20 community safety and wellbeing issues. From this list, participants were asked to rank the top 5 community safety and wellbeing issues in Lethbridge.

75% of survey respondents identified substance use and addiction as the highest priority community safety and wellbeing issue in Lethbridge, while 74% of survey respondents indicated that homelessness is a high priority issue within the community. Complementing these concerns, crimes against property, crimes against persons, and inadequate access to health services were also identified as significant community challenges.

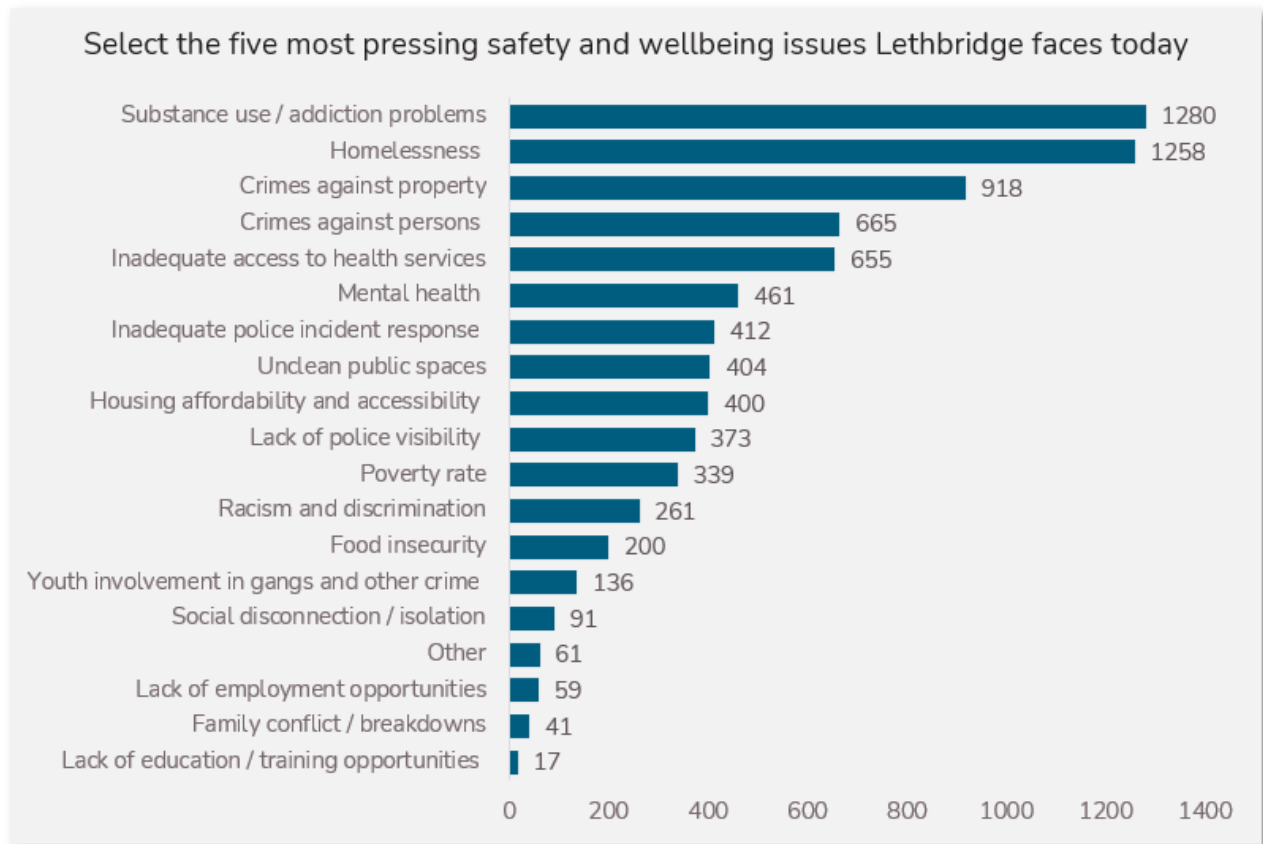
Effectively responding to high priority community safety and wellbeing challenges within Lethbridge (i.e., substance use/addiction problems, homelessness, and crimes against persons and property) requires that the City and its partners continue working towards preventative, social development-oriented interventions through strategies like the Community Wellbeing and Safety Strategy. The proactive promotion of community safety and wellbeing through a community development-oriented approach will help the City address the root causes of highly visible community safety and wellbeing challenges and reduce the likelihood of future occurrences that contribute to community members' lack of perceived safety (e.g., open drug use in public spaces).

Conversely, community safety and wellbeing issues such as a lack of employment opportunities, limited education/training options, and family conflict/breakdown were perceived as less pressing by survey participants. Community members surveyed do not appear to have connected high priority community challenges such as homelessness with challenges like family/conflict breakdown, indicating that there could be an increased role for the City in better educating community members regarding high priority community issues like homelessness and substance use/addiction challenges and the complex factors that contribute to these challenges. For example, how economic and societal issues like poverty and a lack of affordable housing, as well as individual and relational factors like sudden unemployment and/or interpersonal violence, can contribute to homelessness.<sup>3</sup> Enhanced educational efforts regarding homelessness and substance use/addiction problems can help reduce stigma of individuals who are unhoused or are suffering from mental health and / or addictions challenges in Lethbridge and reinforce the importance of diverse community supports.

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<sup>3</sup> Canadian Observatory on Homelessness, [Preventing Homelessness](#).





### Priority Community Safety and Wellbeing Improvement Opportunities

Community members were also asked to prioritize improvement opportunities to enhance their sense of safety and wellbeing. Like identifying pressing community safety and wellbeing issues, survey participants were provided with a list of ~20 community safety and wellbeing improvement opportunities.

The highest priority improvement opportunities identified by surveyed individuals include enacting more robust measures to prevent and address crimes against persons and property, increasing support for substance use and addiction services, expanding shelters and safe spaces for vulnerable populations, and increasing access to health services.

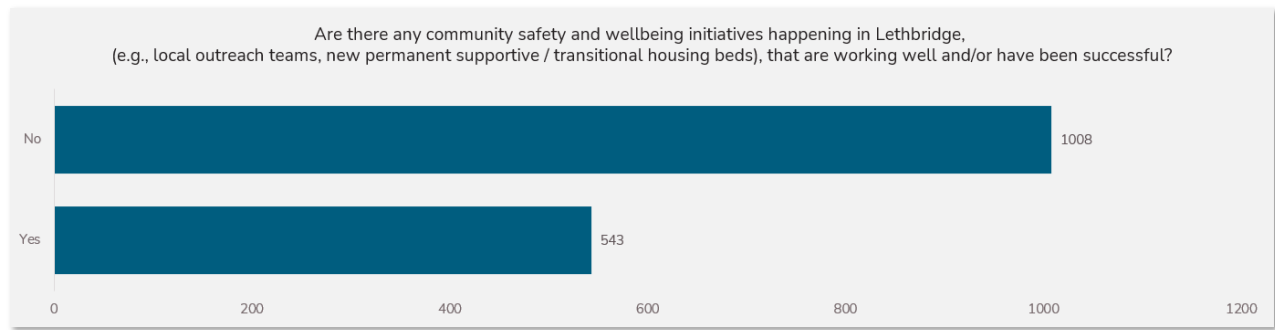
Rounding out the top five priorities for safety and wellbeing enhancements is increasing the visibility of police. It's noteworthy that although this ranks as the fifth-highest priority improvement opportunity, the lack of police visibility itself was identified as only the tenth most pressing safety and wellbeing issue by survey participants. There is an opportunity for Lethbridge to further evaluate community members' perception of the police and how police visibility contributes to feelings / perceptions of safety to inform community safety and wellbeing initiatives.

The community safety and wellbeing improvement opportunities least prioritized by community members include alleviating social disconnection and isolation, strengthening family support services, and facilitating quicker access to street outreach teams. Some community members may have ranked these improvement opportunities as lower priority because they believe sufficient supports exist. For example, in open-ended questions, many surveyed participants mention their appreciation of existing direct outreach supports (e.g., hygiene care, nutritional assistance, harm reduction) in Lethbridge. However, the lower prioritization of alleviating social disconnection and isolation and strengthening family support services may indicate that there is a lack of understanding amongst community members regarding how these improvement opportunities help to effectively address higher visibility community safety and wellbeing issues such as mental health, substance use, and homelessness.



## Awareness of Existing Community Safety and Wellbeing Initiatives

Lethbridge has several initiatives to support inclusion, safety, and wellbeing in the community. To gauge how aware community members are of these initiatives, community members were asked to select whether they think existing community initiatives are working well. 65% of survey participants noted the absence of effective community safety and wellbeing initiatives in Lethbridge. This perception could stem from either a lack of awareness regarding these initiatives or a perception that existing initiatives are ineffective (e.g., due to high visibility challenges such as substance use and homelessness). There is an opportunity for Lethbridge to further investigate the root causes of this perception; doing so could unveil opportunities to enhance awareness of existing initiatives, better promote these initiatives, or/or improve initiatives.



# STAKEHOLDER AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS OVERVIEW & COMMUNITY SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

Community safety and wellbeing stakeholders and the public were provided with multiple digital and in-person consultation opportunities to provide their perspective regarding community safety in Lethbridge. Key takeaways from interviews, focus groups, community surveys, and community pop-ups are included as follows.

## Theme #1: Enforcement

**While many community members perceive crime as a significant challenge in Lethbridge, there is a lack of consensus regarding how crime can be best addressed.**

### Stakeholder & Community Insights

***Many community members have concerns about how crime is addressed in the community.***

While several community members expressed disappointment with policing and the justice system, the reasons behind this dissatisfaction differ. For example, while some community members would like to see an increased police presence, faster response times, and stricter law enforcement, others advocated for an increased focus on crime prevention and the rehabilitation of individuals who have committed a crime.

***While the Lethbridge Police Service (LPS) Watch Program helps many community members feel safe, some individuals would like to see the program evolve in response to community needs.***

The perception of the Watch Program varies among community members, with some viewing it as effective while others consider it ineffective. For instance, some individuals expressed a desire to enhance diversity among participants of the LPS Watch Program; these individuals noted the importance of including more volunteers with backgrounds outside of correctional studies and increasing representation from equity-deserving groups.

Other community members highlighted that they would appreciate increased transparency regarding how Watch volunteers are trained, as well as the opportunity to provide feedback to inform the training of volunteers. For example, some community members would like to know whether volunteers are trained in harm reduction approaches and anti-racism. For these community members, it is important that Lethbridge's growing diversity is acknowledged and informs volunteer behaviours.

## Recommendations for Addressing Community Enforcement Needs

### **1.1 Support increased interaction between LPS, local businesses, and community members.**

It is recommended that the City work alongside LPS to support the “Community Engagement” pillar of their 2023-2026 Strategic Plan to increase engagement between officers, local businesses, and community members to build and sustain trust. For example, by supporting the hosting of additional Community Conversations events through which LPS shares information with and answers questions from the community, or recreational events like volunteer sports tournaments in City parks.

Events should be used to educate community members regarding local crime rates and trends and why officers approach community issues like they do (e.g., legislative constraints related to open drug use). Public engagement should also promote existing LPS open data tools (i.e., the LPS Crime Map and LPS Traffic Violations Map) while educating community members regarding the potential stigmatization of specific neighbourhoods through these tools.

### **1.2 Support continued interaction between LPS and members of equity-deserving groups.**

It is recommended that the City work with LPS to support the “Community Engagement” pillar of their 2023-2026 Strategic Plan to increase engagement between officers and members of equity-deserving groups (e.g., Indigenous Peoples, LGBTQ+ individuals) and other populations with unique needs (e.g., newcomers).

Existing initiatives should be leveraged to support the ongoing training of LPS officers based on the needs of these groups. For example, Action 1.8 of Lethbridge’s Community Wellbeing Strategic Plan outlines working with system and community partners to develop and deliver capacity building and training on trauma-informed care, integrated service delivery, harm reduction and person-centered services across frontline responders and services.

The City should also engage with LPS to consider how greater transparency can be created for community members, specifically regarding officer training and education, to ensure current training curricula aligns with residents' needs.

### **1.3 Increase the diversity of the Watch volunteers.**

The City of Lethbridge is encouraged to partner with LPS to explore opportunities to increase the diversity of the Watch. For instance, through the development of an intentional, action-oriented diversity recruitment plan to inform upcoming volunteer recruitment campaigns. In doing so, insights should be drawn from LPS' initiative to increase recruiting efforts and attract candidates from under-represented groups, as outlined in the "Healthy Organization" pillar of their 2023-2026 Strategic Plan.

#### **1.4 Help community members feel safer in the evening and overnight.**

It is recommended that the City collaborate with LPS to assess why community members feel less safe in the evening and at night and develop a plan to address community evening and overnight safety concerns. This may involve initiatives such as enhancing public education and increasing LPS activities in the evening and overnight.

#### **1.5 Enhance LPS visibility in North Lethbridge.**

It is recommended that the City of Lethbridge engage with LPS to determine the feasibility of expanding the operations of the LPS Downtown Policing Unit (DPU) into North Lethbridge or whether a similar unit to the DPU could be created for North Lethbridge.

### **Theme #2: Security & Promotion**

**Downtown Lethbridge and North Lethbridge are generally seen as less safe by most community members.**

#### **Stakeholder & Community Insights**

***Specific areas in Lethbridge are perceived as unsafe by many community members.***

Many community members expressed feeling unsafe in downtown Lethbridge (e.g., Galt Gardens) and North Lethbridge (e.g., North Legacy Ridge/Legacy Park). Community members also identified feeling unsafe near facilities serving unhoused individuals. This perceived lack of safety can lead to a decrease in foot traffic downtown, particularly at night, negatively impacting local businesses. For instance, while many community members would like to support downtown businesses, some now avoid going downtown, resulting in some businesses shutting down. Business owners cited vandalism, employee safety concerns, and a loss of customers as the main reasons for the closure of their businesses.

Generally, community members highlighted open drug use, petty crime, loitering, and aggressive behaviour in downtown Lethbridge and North Lethbridge as key contributors to their perceived lack of safety. Some of these concerns are reflected in real crime trends in Lethbridge. For example, theft rates in the City have been increasing since 2015, with theft being one of the most common property crime types.<sup>4</sup> Assault rates and theft from auto rates have also been on the rise since 2014, while break and enter rates have seen significant increases since 2018.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> StrategyCorp's Building Safer Communities Fund Final Report – Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

***A lack of pedestrian traffic can cause some community members to feel unsafe during recreational activities.***

While many community members appreciate the City's parks (e.g., Indian Battle Park), some community members feel unsafe when enjoying parks due to limited foot traffic. Some community members mentioned that better attracting community members to City parks and increasing foot traffic would help them feel safer. Others indicated that enhancing the Watch presence in parks would enhance their feelings of safety.

## **Recommendations for Addressing Community Security & Promotion Needs**

### **2.1 Increase Watch coverage at City parks.**

It is recommended that the City of Lethbridge engage with LPS to determine whether Watch volunteer patrols could be expanded in City parks to make them safer and more welcoming spaces.

### **2.2 Make it easier for people to organize events.**

It is recommended that the City enhance the promotion of available grants, incentives, and financial supports for local street activation and placemaking activities (e.g., the Community Event Support Grant) while also evaluating whether geographically limited street activation and placemaking grants (e.g., the Re-imagine Downtown Activation Grant) could be extended to other community safety hotspots in Lethbridge.

In addition, the City should determine whether Lethbridge's event approval process could be simplified for applicants and whether permit fees could be reduced for events in downtown Lethbridge, North Lethbridge, and other community safety hotspots. To help community members host different types of events, there is an opportunity for Lethbridge to continue developing resources like the Neighbourhood Block Party Planning Guide.

### **2.3 Help drive foot traffic in downtown Lethbridge and North Lethbridge.**

It is recommended that the City consult with business representatives and local business owners to evaluate if existing popular events could be made more frequent and potential partnership opportunities for new events.

## **Theme #3: Outreach**

**Direct outreach services for unhoused individuals and those facing mental health or addiction challenges are widely recognized as essential contributors to community safety and wellbeing in Lethbridge.**

## **Stakeholder & Community Insights**

***Community patrols are appreciated by many community members.***

Community patrols targeting unhoused individuals and those facing mental health or addiction challenges were highlighted by community members as vital for enhancing their sense of safety. These outreach efforts garnered praise for their respectful and humane approach and ability to foster trusted relationships within the community.

***Direct outreach support is also seen as an important community service by many people in Lethbridge.***

Some community members emphasized the crucial role of service providers offering transportation and direct outreach support (such as hygiene care, nutritional assistance, and harm reduction) to vulnerable individuals in the community who may be unhoused or experiencing mental health or addiction challenges. Others view these services as effective in supporting LPS and reducing police response times.

### Recommendations for Addressing Community Outreach Needs

#### **3.1 Explore the expansion of diversion / outreach services.**

It is recommended that the City engage community partners to determine the feasibility of extending diversion / outreach service hours and the resources required to do so. At the same time, the City should advocate to the Government of Alberta for the funding required to expand these services.

#### **3.2 Explore the expansion of community patrols.**

It is recommended that the City engage community patrol representatives to determine their interest in making nightly patrols more frequent and the required resources to do so. It is recommended that the City advocate to other levels of government for the funding required to expand community patrols, if desired by patrol representatives.

#### **3.3 Enhance knowledge sharing amongst frontline service providers.**

It is recommended that the City engage the Watch, LPS Community Peace Officers, and outreach / community patrol representatives to identify opportunities for partnership and knowledge and resource sharing between these groups. For instance, opportunities may exist for these groups to better direct clients to one another and enhance client service uptake through the distribution of promotional pamphlets detailing available services and program offerings. Additionally, these groups may further explore how the work of one group can complement another's efforts to better address community safety gaps.

### Theme #4: Cleaning

**The cleanliness of streets, sidewalks, and public facilities is an important contributor to community members' sense of safety and security.**

### Stakeholder & Community Insights



***Clean streets and sidewalks help many community members feel safe.***

Although not identified as the highest priority by community members in the Community Safety Survey, nearly 1 in 4 residents expressed concern about unclean public spaces, encompassing streets, sidewalks, and parks, as one of the most pressing safety and wellbeing issues facing Lethbridge today. Additionally, close to 1 in 5 residents highlighted that enhanced cleanliness of streets and sidewalks is a key improvement opportunity for community safety and wellbeing, contributing to a sense of security in Lethbridge.

Many residents emphasized the positive impact of programs aimed at enhancing the cleanliness, safety, and vibrancy of the City, such as garbage cleanup, sidewalk sweeping, and graffiti removal, on their sense of safety. Some residents explicitly expressed a desire for the expansion of these services in Lethbridge. For instance, some community members suggested extending the operating hours of needle debris collection services to ensure coverage in the afternoon.

**Recommendations for Addressing Community Cleanliness Needs****4.1 Explore the expansion of clean streets / sidewalks initiatives.**

It is recommended that the City engage local business representatives to determine the resources required for extending existing street/sidewalk cleaning and needle debris collection programs, such as increasing operational hours beyond the current limit of two hours per day. Subsequently, the City should advocate to the Government of Alberta for the necessary funding to support the expansion of these programs.

## Theme #5: Built Environment

**Enhancements to public infrastructure could help maximize the usage of City facilities and amenities by community members.**

### Stakeholder & Community Insights

***Pedestrian and cyclist safety is top of mind for many community members.***

While public recreational facilities are appreciated in the community, some community members mentioned that enhancements could be made to help them feel safer enjoying such facilities, including installing additional water fountains and planting more trees, among other enhancements. Other community members highlighted that snow and ice on community walking paths and roads causes them to feel unsafe navigating the City during the winter season (e.g., roads around Cor Van Raay YMCA).

In addition, some community members indicated that traffic rules could be better enforced in the City, particularly stopping at crosswalks, and preventing road racing. The Melcor area and Whoop-Up Drive were specifically highlighted as problematic areas for pedestrian and cyclist safety by community members.

***Improved lighting and visible surveillance infrastructure would help some community members feel safer.***

Some community members highlighted how improved lighting and increased surveillance would help them feel safer across the City, especially in areas where foot traffic can be limited (e.g., downtown Lethbridge). It was suggested that these enhancements would help community members feel more confident of their safety when supporting local businesses and using recreational facilities across Lethbridge.

### Recommendations for Addressing Built Environment Needs in the Community

#### **5.1 Continue actively engaging community members regarding pedestrian and cyclist safety**

It is recommended that the City continue seeking community feedback regarding pedestrian and cyclist safety and mobility initiatives in Lethbridge via Get Involved Lethbridge and other community engagement opportunities.

It is also recommended that the City lead and / or support educational campaigns led by partners related to pedestrian and cyclist safety (e.g., LPS participation in province-wide programs like the Selective Traffic Enforcement Program).

#### **5.2 Continue providing grants, incentives, and financial supports to improve Lethbridge's built environment.**

It is recommended that the City continue offering grants, incentives, and financial supports for local organizations to make built environment improvements in Lethbridge (e.g., the Crime

Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Grant, the Urban Core Property Improvement Grant).

### **5.3 Build capacity regarding CPTED assessments.**

The City should facilitate CPTED training for individuals within the City from multiple organizations and departments, including but not limited to LPS, Planning & Development, Facilities, Parks, and Community Social Development to support greater CPTED proactivity.

### **Theme #6: Public Visibility of Vulnerable Populations**

**Many community members mentioned that the open use of drugs, the visibility of unhoused individuals, and the visibility of individuals experiencing a mental health and/or addictions crisis negatively affects their perception of safety.**

#### **Stakeholder & Community Insights**

***The open use of drugs in public causes some community members to feel unsafe.***

Through the Community Safety Survey, some community members indicated that people using drugs openly in the community (e.g., in Galt Gardens, in the downtown core, etc.) is detrimental to their sense of safety. Youth consulted also mentioned that seeing visible drug use makes them feel unsafe, especially in the downtown area.

***There is a lack of consensus regarding the previous role harm reduction services played in Lethbridge.***

During community engagement, some community members praised harm reduction services for supporting drug users and preventing overdoses. Some substance users in particular mentioned feeling safer thanks to these facilities. On the other hand, some individuals view harm reduction services (e.g., supervised consumption) negatively, citing a correlation between the existence of these services and petty crime.

***Community members identified homelessness and mental health and substance use as the most significant community safety and wellbeing challenges within Lethbridge.***

Some community members shared that seeing unhoused people and those experiencing mental health and / or addictions crises in public places – such as Park Place Mall – makes them feel unsafe. For example, some respondents mentioned these individuals make them uncomfortable because their behaviour could be unpredictable. These concerns were validated by the Community Safety Survey, where 74% of community members indicated that homelessness (including encampments) was one of the most pressing safety and wellbeing issues Lethbridge faces today.

Other community members indicated that education regarding unhoused people and individuals experiencing mental health and / or addictions challenges could be improved to inspire more

understanding and compassion for these individuals.

### **Other Recommendations for Addressing Community Safety Needs**

#### **6.1 Continue educational campaigns to reduce stigma related to homelessness and mental health and / or addictions.**

It is recommended that the City continue developing community engagement and public education strategies and campaigns about homelessness and mental health and / or addictions challenges to reduce stigma and inspire more compassion for unhoused individuals and individuals experiencing a mental health and / or addictions crisis.

To support this recommendation, the City should leverage initiatives related to Action 4.8 of Lethbridge's Community Wellbeing Strategic Plan: Develop innovative community engagement and public education strategies and campaigns aimed at reducing stigma and promoting understanding regarding mental health, substance use, crime and safety, racism, and discrimination.

#### **6.2 Increase the promotion of community safety and wellbeing supports and initiatives.**

It is recommended that the City enhance the promotion of its and its partner's community safety and wellbeing-related educational resources and tools to boost public awareness of them and maximize their uptake (e.g., the Getting Connected Booklet).

It is also recommended that the City help partners promote their successes through local media outlets to raise awareness of existing community safety initiatives.