



AMHERST POLICE DEPARTMENT

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While loitering can generally be seen as a low scale victimless crime, the Town of Amherst has had to deal with a problem of loitering in the downtown core over the last few years. Our department frequently receives complaints of individuals standing loitering in the downtown. Concerns include yelling, swearing, vulgar language, littering, blocked sidewalks which force pedestrians to walk on the street, and aggressive panhandling.

This has been a particular concern for the businesses in the most affected areas. The economy is not as robust as it once was and downtown area businesses are feeling the strains just like every business owner in Amherst. In a survey conducted of the downtown area businesses by our department, 19.3% of the respondents viewed loitering as one of the significant problems affecting their stores. Owners are concerned some customers do not come to their stores because of the loitering issues.

As with many problems we deal with there is no one action that can resolve the problem. We have and continue to address this issue through various initiatives.

Signage. “No Loitering” signs have been posted in the areas most affected. This does two things. First it informs the public that loitering is prohibited. Secondly it assists police with both education/communication and enforcement efforts.

Education/Communication. Officers speak to the parties who are loitering and discuss the issue. They are advised of the concerns raised by the business owners and members of the public. They are also made aware of the laws and potential fines. These include the Town of Amherst Loitering Bylaw and the Province of Nova Scotia Protection of Property Act.

Foot Patrols. Having officers on foot patrol in the affected areas can be more effective than a patrol car driving by. Officers are able and more likely to engage with individuals and their presence can be a deterrent.

Enforcement. We can and have issued tickets for persons loitering in the area. We do speak with individuals and it is our preference they comply with our request not to loiter, but there are those who will not heed the warnings and continuously violate the no loitering laws. The Town of Amherst Loitering Bylaw carries a fine of \$100.00, while the Protection of Property Act fine is \$169.91.

Police enforcement does not target people who stop for a minute after they’ve bought their coffee to chat with a friend. The problem enforcement is attempting to address is those who use the area as a gathering place to meet their friends and “hang out” for extended periods of time. The Town has invested in the downtown core to make it a place for everyone to enjoy. In order to achieve this, the environment must be friendly, welcoming and non-threatening to all.