

SASKATOON BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS

“Community Safety Issues and Actions” Report From the Community Consultation of October 16, 2019 on “Crime and Community Safety in Saskatoon”

The Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners, in its role as a conduit between the public and the Saskatoon Police Service, hosted its annual Community Consultation with a focus on:

- Crime and community safety in our neighbourhoods, and
- Strategies being used by city-wide and community-based groups to enhance community safety.

More than 80 people from community associations, service providers and groups with an interest in community safety, from right across the city, attended the event. They provided their views, opinions, ideas and suggestions directly to the members of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners who took on the role of facilitators at each discussion table with recorders capturing the discussions.

Three presentations were provided with table discussions following these. The discussions at the table were thoughtful, vigorous and diverse. The contribution of interested citizens in the issue of community safety was sincerely appreciated by the members of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners.

Participants heard the following presentations:

- The Safe Community Action Alliance on SCAA purpose, processes and community safety strategies.
- Two Community Associations (Pleasant Hill Community Association, Varsity View Community Association) on crime and community safety in their neighbourhoods and initiatives they undertake to increase community safety, and
- The Saskatoon Police Service on key elements of the Service’s Strategic Plan, canvassing for issues that matter in participants’ neighbourhoods and communities.

Following the Community Consultation, the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners returned the initial “what we heard” report back to all participating groups.

In the interests of continuing to promote and evaluate opportunities for enhanced community safety, the Board of Police Commissioners has captured the key messages heard at the Consultation, followed by identification of initiatives, strategies and observations on these issues.

➤ ***Common Message / Common Theme #1:***

Insufficient levels of police resources arose as a common theme, described in many ways.

These include:

- Response time from the police service being too slow.
- Lesser crimes are often not even reported as police appear too busy to respond.
- Whether it is in the city centre or in neighbourhoods there is a concern that there is insufficient police presence to reduce crime levels / increase the sense of community safety.

- Many neighbourhood and community associations are active and vigilant but don't have access to the level of SPS contact they need.
- Greater policing resources are required all over the city, not just in particular neighbourhoods or areas.
- Alternative methods of police service provision, including tiered policing need to be carefully evaluated so as to provide greater policing presence.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

The initial SPS 2020 budget proposal approved and recommended by the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners included four additional positions. The subsequent SPS budget proposal approved and recommended by the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners included an additional eight officers. Both Police Commission recommendations were subsequently approved by Saskatoon City Council.

The Board will continue to fully evaluate the SPS Strategic Plan to assess its capacity to improve response times, service levels to residents, and police presence in the community. Additionally, the SPS Strategic Plan, expected to be received in the spring of 2020, will also be evaluated for its capacity to provide greater policing resource levels through innovative methods of providing police service and increased connection points with community groups. And finally, the Board, on behalf of residents / taxpayers expects the Police Service to find operational efficiencies that maximize its capacity to address community safety.

Saskatoon is similar to other cities in Canada in that generally 80% of calls are for matters that are not crime related. A few examples include missing persons, a suicide concern, or a person lying on the street, a loud dispute or someone disturbing those passing by. The Police Commission's goal is to create a "culture of community safety".

Clearly, the police are not the answer to all of these problems, even though they cannot be ignored. The answers lie with those more skilled in each area. To create a safer Saskatoon we need to remember the advice of the Chiefs of Saskatoon police over the years when they stated that to reduce crime it takes the community to work on education of the marginalized, reducing homelessness, creating more employment for indigenous people, more resources for mental health and ending violence against women. The Police Commission's goal is to work in our community to develop more effective responses so that police can do their jobs in a safer Saskatoon knowing that citizens in distress are being looked after well.

➤ ***Common Message / Common Theme #2:***

The Police Service needs to better connect with communities through several means.

These include:

- Bring back community policing,
- Have more officers on foot in the communities,
- Have more officers on bikes in the communities.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

The initial SPS 2020 budget proposal which was approved and recommended by the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners included four additional positions, plus eight more in a subsequent budget recommendation, with the intent of increasing availability of community policing resources. The supplementary Board request for the funding of the eight officers was driven partially, but not solely, by the planned opening of a supervised consumption site in Saskatoon. The Board will also fully evaluate the SPS Strategic Plan to ensure it incorporates a level of resources that enable community focused policing.

➤ **Common Message / Common Theme #3:**

Gang activities are spiralling upward and are responsible for much of the crime increase.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

The initial and subsequent 2020 police services budget recommendations that provide for 12 additional police positions, were intended to increase the availability of community policing resources. This will, in turn, better enable the police service to address rising guns and gangs activity levels.

➤ **Common Message / Common Theme #4:**

Drug abuse and addictions are at the core of much of the increased crime rates, whether it is petty crimes or serious crimes, and those need to be addressed in crime prevention and community safety.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

The Board of Police Commissioners, along with the Mayor's Office, were pivotal in the establishment of the Safe Community Action Alliance that is focused on harnessing the efforts of 35 community groups to better deal with core issues, including drug addictions, that fuel crime.

The Board of Police Commissioners, in its interaction with SCAA, will continue to ask SCAA how the Board can assist further in dealing with the role of drug abuse and addictions in the issue of community safety.

This is a large and complicated issue, however, and there are limits on the impact that any single group, whether it be the Board of Police Commissioners or SCAA, can have. Dealing with health related issues such as drug addiction requires an integrated approach on the part of numerous community partners. The Board of Police Commissioners remains committed to encouraging these resources to be integrated to the degree possible as the best approach to enhancing community safety.

➤ **Common Message / Common Theme #5:**

The increase in the number of people living on the streets makes residents feel less safe than they would like.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

The SPS Strategic Plan will be evaluated by the Board for its capacity to provide greater police presence in the community. This issue, however, extends far past policing activities. It represents a complex set of issues that will take considerable skill and commitment to address. The Board of Police Commissioners will remain an advocate of integrated, multi-agency strategies to deal with these community issues, including housing options, a particular priority of the Safe Community Action Alliance. It is through this type of collective and integrated action that issues like this that progress can be made in increasing residents' sense of community safety.

➤ **Common Message / Common Theme #6:**

Low income rental housing is often a source of crime related problems.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

Again, the Board of Police Commissioners remains very supportive of the Safe Community Action Alliance as it and many other groups focus their efforts on greater availability of, and access to, improved housing options. The Board of Police Commissioners continues to encourage community-led, strategic partnerships that focus on addressing issues such as this.

➤ **Common Message / Common Theme #7:**
Prostitution and sex trafficking remain a serious problem.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

The Board notes that prostitution is not a criminal offence but also recognizes that it can have serious negative effects on a neighbourhood. The Police Commission wants to ensure that those negative effects are properly addressed and so it will evaluate the SPS Strategic Plan to ensure it can deal with these specific community concerns. Sex trafficking, on the other hand, is very much a criminal offence and this is an example of an issue that needs police leadership and community support of that leadership.

➤ **Common Message / Common Theme #8:**
New communication methods are needed between the police and interested groups such as community associations.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

All meetings of the Board are structured to hear from community groups on issues related to community safety. The Board heartily welcomes input from residents and groups at each and every one of its monthly meetings. In addition, the Police Commission held its mid-October 2019 community consultation on crime and community safety, attended by about 80 residents from across the city. From that dialogue, which was facilitated by members of the Board of Police Commissioners and from which this report is drawn, the Board will evaluate how it, and the Police Service, can best connect with community groups on the issue of community safety on an ongoing basis.

Common Message / Common Theme #9:
There needs to be increased focus on mental health issues and their impact on crime and community safety.

Initiatives, Strategies and Observations of the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners include:

This is a huge issue, requiring a wide range of resources. That said, it is also an issue in which the Board of Police Commissioners is vitally interested, given the degree to which mental health issues impact crime and community safety. The Board continues to encourage groups such as the Safe Community Action Alliance and the Community Safety & Well-being Partners to continue to move ahead with their teamwork focused approaches.

The Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners will continue to actively support initiatives that harness the required resources and act in a systematic, integrated manner to address these “root cause issues” that are critical in achieving a culture of community safety.

The Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners sincerely appreciates your ongoing interest in community safety.