

MINUTES

OTTAWA-CARLETON REGIONAL POLICE SERVICES BOARD

CITY OF CUMBERLAND COUNCIL CHAMBERS

13 SEPTEMBER 1999

7:00 P.M.

PRESENT

Chair: Councillor H. Kreling

Members: Mr. D. Adam, Ms. E. Buckingham, Mr. J. McCombie

REGRETS

Vice Chair G. Baskerville, Regional Chair B. Chiarelli, Councillor J. Legendre

ITEMS OF BUSINESS

1. STAFF PRESENTATION ON
REGIONAL POLICING IN THE CITY OF CUMBERLAND

Board Chair Kreling began the meeting by recognizing members of Cumberland City Council who were in attendance: Councillors J. Morgan and F. Stronach and Mayor G. Lalonde. He invited the Mayor to make some opening remarks.

Mayor Lalonde welcomed members of the Board to the City of Cumberland. He recalled that on 1 January, 1998 Cumberland made the transition from OPP to Ottawa-Carleton policing, just days before the ice storm. He noted that during the ice storm the police provided tremendous support and assistance to his community, and that spirit of cooperation continues today. However, he indicated Cumberland's residents and Council are not entirely satisfied with the level of service provided by the Ottawa-Carleton Police. He did not believe levels of service have been maintained as promised in terms of visibility and traffic enforcement. He stated Cumberland is experiencing problems with graffiti, vandalism and speeding and he hoped the City, the Board and the Police Service could work together to address these issues.

Chair Kreling acknowledged Mayor Lalonde's concerns, noting he had discussed them with the Mayor earlier in the day. He then explained the format of the meeting was to hear a staff presentation on policing in Cumberland, following which residents and members of Council could express their concerns.

Superintendent P. Cuthbert, the officer in charge of East Division, explained that East Division includes everything east of the Rideau Canal. He introduced the other officers in attendance who work in Cumberland.

The Superintendent then highlighted a few key milestones: a successful changeover; the integration into Regional Police command, operations and administrative structure during 1998; and the roll-out of the new district policing model. He noted that a number of committed officers volunteered to work in the district because many live there and have a vested interest in the community.

He explained that East Division is divided into a number of districts. District 31, which includes Cumberland, serves a population of 83,700 and covers approximately 5,600 square kilometers. Officers in each of East Division's districts have access to operational support within the Division as well as specialized central supports.

Inspector Phil Lockett explained that he is in charge of districts 31 and 36 and temporarily tasked with district 35. He recalled that at the time of the amalgamation, he met with the former mayor of Cumberland, Brian Coburn, who expressed particular interest in a bicycle patrol. As a result of his input, a bike squad was implemented.

He noted that region-wide, crime is on the decline while calls for service are up slightly. He provided some highlights of statistics for district 31, noting in particular that responses to alarm calls have increased as well as missing persons incidents. He indicated the Police Service has implemented a variety of initiatives to address the issue of false alarms and he believed the high number of missing persons calls was partially due to the fifteen (15) homes for youth located within the district.

Inspector Lockett introduced Staff Sergeant George Savage who is in charge of district 31 and who has been instrumental in pulling together the resources to deal with issues of particular concern to the residents of Cumberland.

Staff Sergeant Savage outlined some of the programs and initiatives that have been undertaken to solve problems within the district and noted several of these programs have been featured very positively by the local media. He stressed the importance of the community, the media and the police working together to solve problems. He indicated one particular officer within the district has issued 2,500 traffic tickets since the start of the year. He acknowledged the speeding problem in Vars and re-iterated his commitment to working with residents on this issue. In response to concerns, police recently worked with residents and the Regional Transportation Department to have a stop sign installed at a problem intersection in Vars. This has helped, but he recognized further work must be done. He also stated Community Policing Centers (CPC) play an intricate role in providing services to the community.

Mr. Weston, a volunteer in a community policing centre listed some of the tasks and functions performed by volunteers. They include: taking reports in order to free up officers; taking part in a variety of events; and assisting in the delivery of programs such as Home Security, Neighborhood Watch, and Bicycle Registries. He indicated there are over 900 volunteers working with the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service and forty-one (41) of them work in District 31.

Staff Sergeant Savage indicated that as the Staff Sergeant for District 31 he participates in regular meetings of community safety groups and organizations, does security evaluations and neighborhood watch presentations, liaises with the local business community, meets with various clubs, works with community resource centres, participates in the Fire Department's open houses and community forums and maintains a close working relationship with school resource officers and emergency response officers.

Inspector Lockett indicated that nine months into district policing, there is still much fine tuning to be done. He explained district policing means keeping officers within an area so they get to know the community they serve. He stated training is a big issue, and it is his job to ensure there is a balance of skills at all times within the district. The Service has become more technologically advanced with each police cruiser being equipped with a laptop computer and this initiative required a significant amount of training. He stated there is an on-going need to evaluate staffing levels. As an example, there is a pilot project underway to amalgamate districts 31 and 36 in an effort to reduce management staff and increase the number of front-line officers. He expressed frustration with the fact that some specialty units don't report directly to the District Inspectors and noted the Service is looking at moving towards having officers from these units work alongside patrol officers.

He re-iterated that District 31 has been a leader in problem solving projects and he and his staff are always open to suggestions. He encouraged residents to come forward with their concerns and to provide input.

R. Mar, Manager of Organizational Development, presented the results of a survey that was done in April. He noted the timing for the survey was opportune as it was approximately one year after the original changeover to Regional Policing. He explained that the survey was conducted by Statistics Canada, involved door-to-door interviews with adult residents, and recognized the dual nature of the district with respect to urban versus rural areas. Mr. Mar provided some of the highlights with respect to community perceptions of crime rates, concerns with regard to certain types of crimes, the community's sense of safety, and its level of satisfaction with policing. He also provided some comparisons with a similar survey conducted in 1998. Mr. Mar added the survey was confidential and conducted by a third party, and it represented a large enough portion of the population to be considered reliable.

Though he acknowledged the system is not perfect and the Police Service may have a long way to go to achieve perfection, Superintendent Cuthbert stressed the Police Service has a dedicated and committed team working in Cumberland. There are initiatives in place to address issues, the Service constantly monitors situations, and seeks feedback from the community and its partners.

Chair Kreling noted an additional initiative is the building of a new East Division office in Cumberland, at the corner of Tenth Line Road and St. Joseph Boulevard. Though he had hoped the process would be quicker, he indicated there would be a ground-breaking ceremony in the year 2000.

Chair Kreling then invited comments from the audience.

2. PUBLIC DELEGATIONS

Mr. C. Bertrand, a resident of Vars, expressed concerns with motorists travelling through Vars to get to Highway 417 at speeds in excess of 70 kilometers per hour in a 50 kilometer zone, despite a recently installed stop sign. He acknowledged the new sign has improved the situation but requested an increase in police enforcement. Mr. Bertrand said he has also noted a decrease in police visibility since the transition to district policing. He recalled that OPP officers used to be seen in Vars approximately once per month. When the Region took over policing this was greatly improved, but since the implementation of district policing, he believed Vars seems to have been forgotten. He explained that in Vars, there are three homes for persons with mild psychiatric illnesses. The residents of these homes are frequently on the streets and police visibility helps keep them in line. He understood the difficulties of balancing resources with community needs but asked that the police try to improve their visibility in his community.

Chair Kreling indicated he had had discussions with Regional Councillor R. van den Ham with regard to the problems of speeding and the need for a stop sign in Vars. He was pleased to hear the new sign had made some improvement. He believed Mr. Bertrand's comments were reflective of the views of his community and thanked him for his input. Superintendent Cuthbert added the Police Service has responded to requests for additional enforcement in Vars and will continue to monitor the situation there.

Mr. P. McClure, a resident of the Queenswood Heights Community, noted the staff presentation did not provide any real numbers in terms of the officers assigned to Cumberland. He recalled that at the time of the transition, residents were promised something in the order of 40 officers in the district. He did not believe there were that many officers in District 31. Superintendent Cuthbert explained that he can not give an exact number because it's a team effort. Patrol officers in Cumberland receive assistance as required from the division, as well as from all centrally located specialty units.

Chair Kreling indicated there are approximately 31 officers assigned to District 31. Those officers also have access to a number of support services and specialty units. If confronted with a situation where assistance was needed, the commanding officer can pull in officers from other units as required. As a whole, the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service has a complement of approximately 1,050 officers and 400 civilian staff. That gives the Service a staff/population ratio of about 1:650 which is an average ratio for an area like Ottawa-Carleton. He stressed it is the Board's intention to maintain the level of service the community requires. He noted a lot of police work is done outside of cruisers and is therefore not necessarily visible, but is effective nonetheless.

Deputy Chief Bevan referred to the tragedy at OC Transpo and noted that within minutes of the occurrence, 46 officers were on site and over 100 employees of the OCRPS were involved before the situation was resolved. He maintained that is the kind of response the community would receive should a major incident occur.

Mr. R. Hamelin, Fallingbrook Community Association, expressed concerns with the police's ability to respond promptly to calls for service. He noted there has been a noted increase in the number of break & enter's and vandalism incidents in his community over the summer. He indicated the community, the city and the police are trying to address this problem and wondered what more could be done. He echoed the previous speakers' comments with regard to a reduction in police visibility.

Chair Kreling noted he also is a resident of Fallingbrook, and he re-iterated that as much as possible, officers were given a choice of communities in which they wanted to work. Therefore, most of the officers in Cumberland live there and have a vested interest in ensuring the safety of the community. With regard to increases in the number of incidents in Fallingbrook, Chair Kreling believed the numbers tend to shift from one community to the next so while Fallingbrook has seen an increase in incidents, Queenswood Heights has seen a small decrease.

Councillor J. Morgan, City of Cumberland, re-iterated many of the previous speakers' comments. In particular, he spoke to the incident numbers in Queenswood Heights versus those in Fallingbrook and to the traffic problems in Vars. He stated he has also heard reports of drug activity in neighborhood parks. He added in 1998, Cumberland had four bicycle patrol officers while this year it had only two. He noted that when residents request assistance the police respond, but he maintained they are not as visible as they were in 1998 and he stressed the district needs more traffic enforcement.

Inspector Lockett acknowledged the residents' concerns and re-iterated the police are implementing initiatives to increase the number of officers on the streets, such as combining two districts and taking low priority call reports over the telephone.

Mr. R. Kendall, a resident, stated that while walking through a neighborhood park on Sunday, he noticed a young man sleeping in a play structure. When he tried to call the police to alert

them to this, he got a recorded message saying the centre was closed. He then called the Fire Department who promptly responded and called the police, who then arrived on scene. Mr. Kendall wondered if he should have called 9-1-1 to receive a police response.

Chair Kreling explained the 9-1-1 service is to be used for life threatening emergencies or crimes in progress. He stated that last year, the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Service initiated its "Make the Right Call" campaign so people would know what number to call when they needed to contact the police in non-emergency situations. He indicated the correct number to call is 236-1222 and at that number, callers get a menu of options for directing their call. He also noted the red pages at the front of the Bell Telephone Directory, which lists the police numbers and explains which number to call.

Inspector Lockett believed the speaker may have reached a community policing centre which would have been closed at that time. He indicated he would look into how calls are routed from these centres when they are closed, to ensure callers can always reach a live person.

Mr. Coupal, a resident of Bottriel Street, stated he lives across from Sir Wilfred Laurier School. He indicated people drive at excessive speeds in that area and when sporting activities are underway in adjacent fields, cars are parked on both sides of the street causing a very dangerous situation. He maintained residents in his neighborhood are very concerned. Chair Kreling stated Inspector Lockett and Staff Sergeant Savage had noted Mr. Coupal's concern and would look into the situation.

Mr. A. Wilson, a resident of Queen Street, believed traffic problems are as much a matter of education as enforcement. Chair Kreling agreed there is room for improvement in this area and hoped community forums would be organized, in conjunction with other Regional Departments, to promote public education.

Councillor J. Morgan asked that on those occasions when officers have the opportunity to choose between issuing a ticket under a municipal by-law or the Highway Traffic Act, that tickets be issued under the by-law.

Mr. McClure wondered if there were plans to increase the size of the police force. Chair Kreling indicated the Service has reached its 1999 target of 1,050 sworn officers. He explained that to date the Board has not discussed further increases but the matter is reviewed annually. He added, the Board will be receiving within the next few months a report with regard to deployment of staff, which is also monitored on an on-going basis.

Member Buckingham added that in response to recent provincial regulations, the Board has undertaken a process to put in place a strategic agenda which will be a five to ten year plan. This process entails a review of the way services are delivered and will allow the Board to identify any gaps. She noted that as part of this process, the Board will be engaging in community forums to receive public input, and she expected that many of those in attendance tonight would wish to participate in the forums.

In closing, Chair Kreling thanked residents and members of Cumberland City Council for attending the meeting and sharing their comments and observations. He re-iterated the Ottawa-Carleton Regional Police Services Board and the Police Service are committed to this community as it is to every community in Ottawa-Carleton. He acknowledged the comments received and indicated that, where possible, the police would move immediately to address residents' concerns. He stated that all organizations are confronted with challenges in dealing with limited resources. The Board continues to do battle for budget dollars and to find the correct balance between resources and service delivery.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:05 p.m.

W. Fedec
Executive Director

H. Kreling
Chair