



City of Surrey

Public Safety Committee

Minutes

Executive Boardroom
City Hall
14245 - 56 Avenue
Surrey, B.C.
WEDNESDAY, JULY 9, 2003
Time: 9:08 a.m.

Present:

Chair: Councillor Tymoschuk
Councillor P. Priddy
Councillor B. Steele

Supt. B. Harford, B.C. Ambulance
Services

Absent:

Councillor M. Hunt

Staff Present:

City Manager
A/Commr. G. Forbes, RCMP
Supt. R. Bennett, RCMP
City Solicitor
Fire Chief Garis
T. Lewis, Asst. Fire Chief
J. Sherstone, Manager, By-law & Licensing
Services
S. Palmer, Legislative Services

The Chair briefly discussed the objectives of the Public Safety Committee. He then noted that the members of the Safe & Clean City Committee would be formally notified by way of letter of the disbandment of this sub-committee and thanked for their work. He added that Councillor Watts would finish off her work with the Drug Crime Task Force and that a final report would come before Council with the appropriate recommendations.

Chief Garis then introduced Tom Lewis, Assistant Fire Chief, in charge of emergency planning.

A. ADOPTION OF MINUTES

1. Public Safety Committee - June 11, 2003

It was Moved by Councillor Steele
Seconded by Councillor Priddy
That the minutes of the Public Safety
Committee meeting held on June 11, 2003, be adopted.
Carried

B. RCMP

1. Staffing

Discussion ensued with respect to RCMP staffing with the following comments being made:

- That the complement of the Surrey RCMP currently stands at 400 and with the arrival of the 20 new members approved by Council on July 1, 2003, that total will increase to 420 members.
- That there are 8 positions in the detachment with no officers named, and several actions are being pursued to fill these vacancies.

- That of the 20 new members to arrive, 15 will be placed on the Special Projects Unit to be utilized in areas such as the Whalley Initiative, grow operations, special events and would be under Supt. Bennett's direct command and control.
- That "E" Division has been given the request to provide a list of available candidates with the requisite skills. Supt. Bennett added that the list of candidates would be reviewed over the next few weeks.
- That the new members would be housed at the main RCMP detachment and deployed in groups of 3 to 5 officers to different areas in the community.
- That the remaining 5 officers would be deployed as follows: 3 members would be assigned to Major Crime Investigations, 1 member will be assigned to Internal Investigations, 1 member will be assigned to Community Policing, servicing the entire city.
- That Surrey will still pay for the 12 officers who were deployed to the Integrated Homicide Unit.
- That there is also 1 Provincial position and 1 Federal position in Surrey.

The question was raised as to whether the Surrey RCMP still undertake "John" sting operations and the response was in the affirmative, noting that the most recent operation took place last week as a joint venture between the City of Surrey and the City of Vancouver. Supt. Bennett noted that he would provide figures on the number of clients identified through that operation for Councillor Priddy.

A/Commr. Forbes commented that S/Sgt. G. Dobrowolski has been deployed to Administration Support Services, S/Sgt. R. Fisher to Traffic Section, and S/Sgt. C. Robertson to District Office 2.

2. Crime Trends

Supt. Bennett reported that he would continue to provide quarterly reports on crime trends to the committee. He added that the number of stolen autos, although still high, appears to have decreased since the previous year. He continued that although crime reported in the Whalley area may appear to have increased, this could be an indication of the good law enforcement taking place resulting in more arrests and jail sentences.

Supt. Bennett commented that a significant crime trend receiving media attention is mailbox and postal outlet thefts. He added that this is not just a Lower Mainland concern but one of national interest, resulting in thefts in the multi-million dollar range. Supt. Bennett reported that officers have been dedicated to investigate these crimes and noted that a recent house raid resulted in the arrest of 8 people charged with forgery and cheque fraud.

He continued that this type of crime affects everyone and went on to describe the various stages of the criminal process such as document preparation, personal identification theft and personal profiling. He pointed out that this type of multi-national crime is on the increase and along with grow operations present great concern to police.

A/Commr. Forbes commented that there have been discussions with the Federal government regarding an integrated approach in dealing with grow operations and that there is indication that a more enhanced approach from all levels of government would be taken to combat this epidemic throughout the whole Lower Mainland.

The Chair noted that he had attended a public meeting in Fraser Heights, which featured a panel discussion with S/Sgt. Fisher, the Hon. Chuck Cadman, MP (Surrey North), Dave Hayer, MLA (Surrey Tynehead), Councillor Watts, representatives from the Fraser Valley Real Estate Board and from B.C. Hydro. He noted the high level of frustration expressed by the area residents and the underlying message that penalties are not severe enough to create a significant deterrent. He reported that the Hon. Chuck Cadman urged the residents to direct their anger and frustration through letters to the Federal Government urging for the review of current legislation and jail sentencing.

Councillor Priddy then noted that people tend to forget the added costs borne by the Provincial Government through the additional cost of young children being taken into care as a result of the dismantling of grow operations.

A/Commr. Forbes commented that the RCMP has experienced some significant investigations being hampered by the community getting involved in grow operations, impeding the investigation process. He added that more information would be provided to the committee on this subject in the fall.

Councillor Tymoschuk noted that the discussion panel at the Fraser Heights meeting tried to discourage people from getting involved in grow operations other than reporting any suspicions to the police.

The City Manager asked if there was a professionally correct manner in which the members of Council and the Mayor could be informed on upcoming investigations. Supt. Bennett responded that the information is shared on a "need to know" basis and the risk of jeopardizing the investigation is too great. He added that Council must display confidence that the RCMP is out there doing the best it can with the resources available and that certain disclosures cannot take place. He noted that policing is not just a uniformed presence; that there are many behind the scene and underground operations in place.

3. Community Policing

(a) Whalley Initiative Update

Councillor Tymoschuk reported that, as a member of the Mayor's Action Team, he had noted a decrease in loitering in the side streets in the Whalley core area. He added that 135A Street still poses concern but has improved through property clean-up initiatives.

Supt. Bennett reported that the increased level of enforcement in the Whalley area is causing some displacement issues but not as significant as originally believed. He added that the problem in Whalley is that all the wants and needs of the drug traffickers and users are being met through the centralized location and easy access to various services such as the soup kitchen, methadone dispensaries, pawn shops, and needle exchange. He continued that they are dealing with the same core people and that the RCMP has made a commitment to keep dedicated officers highly visible in the area. He added that there has been a noticeable difference in the community through the multi-disciplined approach taken by By-laws, RCMP, Engineering, Fire Services, and Parks, Recreation & Culture.

The Chair requested statistics in terms of bike and foot patrols. Supt. Bennett reported that District Office No. 1 has dedicated foot and bike patrols, supplemented by the centralized RCMP bike patrol. He continued that the drug squad moves around the city, spending approximately 50% of its time in the Whalley area, dealing with cocaine and methadone related crime.

Supt. Bennett stated that he provides a report to the Mayor and the City Manager on a weekly basis providing a general overview of significant files of interest taking place in the city. The suggestion was made that the report could be shared with all members of Council, on the condition that the information be kept strictly confidential.

With respect to the number of officers on foot and bike patrol duty, Supt. Bennett reported that numbers fluctuate according to demand. He explained that there could be 4 bike patrol officers on duty in the Whalley area, supplemented by 2 officers from the centralized bike patrol. He noted that shifts run 24/7, and that patrols are increased during the peak evening hours. Supt. Bennett also pointed that there have been as many as 20 dedicated officers in some parts of the Whalley area (106 Avenue and 103 Avenue) at certain times.

The Manager, By-law & Licensing Services stated that there are 3 ongoing committees dealing with the Whalley area: the Mayor's Action Team, District Office No. 1's team, and the City Manager's Whalley Enhancement team. He noted that together with the RCMP, the City is getting the community involved and achieving buy-in by local residents and businesses providing solutions. He cited the following examples of solutions offered by the residents and business owners:

- the garden project through Surrey Social Futures;
- the Front Room and needle exchange providing resources to do litter pick-up in the area;
- 50 property owners have been served notice to clean up their properties and boulevards;
- SkyTrain has had their public telephones changed to providing only information and 911 services after 5:00 p.m.

- SkyTrain will provide additional lighting;
- Additional uniformed By-law officers patrolling the parks over the summer include 3 ex-RCMP officers;
- the crime free multi family housing program;
- the Taxi stand has been relocated; and
- increased fire inspections.

The comment was made that the greatest contribution to improving the Whalley area has been the multi-faceted approach through the RCMP, By-law Enforcement, Fire Services, Engineering, Parks, Recreation & Culture and the community. The statement was then made that the problems are not just policing issues, but social issues that have been years in the making and will take some time to turn around.

The comment was made that the realization of solutions in a number of areas goes beyond the little influence or authority local government may offer, and that adequate social provisions must be provided by higher levels of government (judiciary and improved responsiveness to the crimes of today). It was added that solutions lay in vigilance in areas of Federal and Provincial governments to fight international organized crime; local government can only deal with the symptoms.

The City Manager commented that Whalley is a large area but the City Centre area (a 2 to 2 1/2 block radius in the 135A Street area) has inherited significant drug infrastructure with the needle exchange, methadone clinics, pawn shops, SkyTrain, cheque-cashing businesses, low rental housing, and overgrown bush; and it is not surprising that the drug trade occurs in that area.

The statement was made that the next step in attacking this problem area should involve a strategy to deal with the physical infrastructure, which attracts that clientele. It was added that the bigger ticket items of harm reduction, social housing, and the judiciary need to be addressed, however, land use zoning and licensing have roles to play in breaking up the concentration of this type of infrastructure and dispersing it throughout the city.

Councillor Priddy stated that Professor Hertzman of UBC found that children who are not ready for kindergarten and are most at risk, usually live in low cost housing, with the least amount of access to the types of education, recreation and programs necessary to help them become successful citizens. She noted it is a difficult pattern to break.

A/Commr. Forbes stated that North Carolina has provided a good example of fighting crime through social development. He added that he would share literature on this matter with the committee members.

The Manager, By-law & Licensing Services discussed the crime free multi family program and added that door prizes of recreation passes were distributed to the participants.

Chief Garis commented that in the interest of providing education for life and building safety, the inspection process has been stepped up especially in those areas where people congregate. He noted that there is not much the Fire Service can do in terms of enforcement, however, firefighters can provide a uniformed presence, move people along, and provide a positive role model. He added that a proposal has been made to host safety events in the local parks.

Chief Garis commented that the Fire Service can try to help with grow operations if possible, but caution must be used when entering these premises, both from a safety and legislative perspective.

In response to a question, the Manager, By-law & Licensing Services, noted that measuring success of initiatives in the Whalley area could be made by noting the numbers of calls for police and by-law enforcement, but emphasized that the bottom line for determining success is cost (resources, staff, officers needed to achieve the goals). He added that Whalley is not going to change overnight.

Councillor Steele noted that the number of phone calls she has received regarding the Whalley area has decreased.

A/Commr. Forbes posed the suggestion that the Public Safety Committee develop a long-term strategic plan and benchmark at the five-year mark using a Gantt chart similar to the process used by the North Carolina Crime Prevention organization.

The comment was made that Surrey needs a long-term strategy including qualitative measurements for measuring improvement. The long-term strategy would evolve into one City Centre integrated organization as opposed to many different organizations.

Asst. Fire Chief Lewis noted that he had worked in Whalley and that a good barometer for measuring improvements is through the input of local business owners.

Fire Chief Garis commented that the City has done good work in terms of methadone clinics and noted that other areas have been identified such as pawnshops and needle exchanges. He continued that, in terms of planning exercise and land use, the City could take action today against pawnshops and all these elements over time would be displaced or not allowed to exist. He also suggested that pawnshops, because they are existing non-conforming usage, could be limited to 2 locations per a defined area. Chief Garis suggested the needle exchange be mobilized and decentralized so it is no longer a magnet.

Councillor Priddy suggested a sub-committee be struck to deal with qualitative measurements to measure the fact that the quality of life in the city's town center is changing.

Councillor Steele commented that the Provincial Government's objective is to add more rehab and detox services into that area, but that is not the City's solution and the Province needs to be aware of that fact. She added that these services are needed in Surrey but not in that one area.

The following points were then made:

- Ideas and solutions must be provided on an element-by-element basis.
- The Whalley Enhancement strategy is only one element of the bigger picture.
- Focus on the big picture - what else can be done to achieve long lasting results in the City Centre area.
- There are some initiatives the City can undertake on an element-by-element basis to show the City Centre area can be more appealing to those community members with positive lives such as family, youth and children and that is the reason \$5 million has been spent on parks, recreation and safety improvements in the area.

(b) Grow Operations Update

The statement was made that Surrey RCMP's video presentation regarding grow operations was made to the Federal Government. Information from Ottawa indicates that the presentation made a positive significant impact by way of increased Federal funding to combat grow operations, and the integration and stepping up of police enforcement to deal with the problem.

A/Commr. Forbes commented that as funding is developed, Surrey will want to be part of that strategy to keep the issue current and fresh in the political arena to ensure funding is shared outside central Canada.

The City Manager commented that one initiative in dealing with grow operations is bringing to bear all the other resources not traditionally used, such as B.C. Hydro, By-law Enforcement, and RCMP and looking at avenues or measures that would allow the use of more effective tools to attack grow operations. He noted that two elements include B.C. Hydro providing locations of suspected grow operations and expedition of billing of grow operations.

The Manager, By-law & Licensing Services stated a meeting would be scheduled with B.C. Hydro, By-law & Licensing Services, Engineering,

Fire Services, and the RCMP to address the problems and identify solutions.

(c) Auto Theft Update

The comment was made that numbers of auto thefts are down but Surrey still retains a reputation of being the North American capital for vehicle theft. Supt. Bennett noted that the report forwarded to the Mayor contains a snapshot of auto thefts for the month; however, the figures are not fully verified and are subject to change. He added that it could take up to a month to verify the information.

Supt. Bennett reported that he is confident that the numbers of stolen vehicles is down but cautioned that the media has access to this unverified information through ICBC and through their own investigative reporting process.

Supt. Bennett noted that the Auto Theft Task Force is presently housed in Delta and is looking to relocate to new offices in Surrey. He pointed out the benefit to this move, which would add another 44 investigative officers to the community.

The comment was made that percentages would be more beneficial when reporting statistical information rather than using hard numbers.

Supt. Bennett reported that in comparison with last year's figures, auto theft is down 18% in Surrey. He noted that the report to the Mayor contains "unscrubbed" numbers, which may provide opportunity for misinterpretation of the figures and added that the quarterly reports provided to the Public Safety Committee contain verified numbers.

(d) Drug Trade Update

See earlier discussion under Item B(a).

C. BY-LAWS/LEGAL

1. Billing for Grow Operations

The following information was provided regarding grow operations:

- That to date the City has billed \$117,620.07 compared to \$161,000 billed in 2002.
- That those amounts were added to owners' property taxes and were recoverable.

- That to provide faster turn around, RCMP readers are working closely with By-law staff in providing information regarding grow operations.
- That there are fewer rental properties involved in grow operations; grow operations are being set up in new homes which may be flipped in a short period of time if the owner knows a charge is pending.
- That once the invoice for grow operation charges are registered, the new owner must pay any outstanding fines.
- That the judiciary will take a long time, therefore new tools must be developed to deal with grow operations and attack their financial bottom-line.
- That the charges allow the City to collect costs involved in the provision of emergency services, and allow for reinvestment into better grow operation enforcement.
- That the streamlining and use of this provision, created 3 years ago, can recover costs expediently, and will be leveraged as best we can so that it becomes a deterrent for those wishing to undertake grow operations in Surrey and force the displacement of these operations.

Discussion ensued with respect to the fine amounts listed in the by-law and the City Solicitor noted that the Chief Judge sets the amount of the fines; that this is the nature of by-law offenses in that they are not designed to be high fines. Councillor Priddy noted that the fines for grow operations and false fire alarms are not comparable. The Manager, By-law & Licensing Services stated that the City fines the property owner, not the perpetrator and represents a cost recovery for services rendered.

2. Billing for False Alarms

The following comments were provided:

- That Fire Services provides a monthly report and By-law & Licensing Services do all the billing.
- That when the RCMP attend a false fire alarm, the charge is marked as billable on the computer system and reported to By-law & Licensing Services.
- That RCMP will follow up by leaving a "door hanger" on the property notifying the owner/resident that a false alarm has been reported and a bill will be forthcoming.

The City Manager noted that the prime objective is not to collect the fee but to save resources. He added that the RCMP reported that 14,000 false alarm calls were being attended on an annual basis using valuable resources that could be better deployed elsewhere. He continued that this procedure will be simple to implement and provide revenues.

3. Pawnshops

The comment was made that leverage options in dealing with pawnshops be examined and monthly reports provided to the committee.

D. FIRE SERVICES

There were no items under Fire Services at this time.

E. OUTSTANDING ACTION ITEMS

1. City Centre

Public Safety Committee to provide appropriate comments on Whalley enhancement strategies in the City Centre area.

F. OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

1. Terms of Reference

The Chair noted that the Terms of Reference for the Public Safety Committee would be updated and brought forward to the committee for review.

G. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting has been scheduled for Wednesday, September 10, 2003 at 9:00 a.m. in the Executive Boardroom.

H. MOTION TO HOLD CLOSED PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING

It is in order that a motion be made to hold the Public Safety Committee meeting in an “in camera” session in accordance with Section 242.2(1) (f), (h), and (i) of the *Local Government Act*.

It was

Moved by Councillor Steele

Seconded by Councillor Priddy

That a Public Safety Committee meeting be held in a closed session in accordance with Section 242.2(1) (f), (h), and (i) of the *Local Government Act*.

Carried

I. ADJOURNMENT

It was

Moved by Councillor Steele
Seconded by Councillor Priddy
That the Public Safety Committee meeting

do now adjourn.

Carried

The Public Safety Committee adjourned at 11:01 a.m.

Chairperson