

Chief's Verbal for OPSB Meeting - April 26, 2021

Good afternoon, bon après midi,

Chair Deans, thank you for your insightful and impactful report.

I have been listening to and reflecting on your verbal report as well as all of the delegations today. There were many common themes relating to unresolved historical issues which have been further aggravated and exposed by the once in a generation challenges we have all been facing over the last year....

There was generally a unified and urgent desire expressed for major improvements in policing as well as in all facets of society to achieve greater levels of equity, safety and health outcomes.... particularly for those who have the least and who suffer the most.

These are themes that most decent thoughtful community members and police service members can understand and agree, work together to achieve solutions for.

These are the same themes that will be the focus of my report in which I will outline some of the strategies and initiatives that the OPS has been working with our community partners over the last month.

COMMUNITY & SERVICE ENGAGEMENT

Every day OPS members meet, speak and work with a wide variety of community stakeholders; youth, elders, elected officials, justice system partners and social services agencies.

In the past month I have personally met with the list of people and agencies depicted on the slide - this includes respected youth leaders and elders from a variety of demographic and geographic communities.

Over the same time period I have also personally participated in an ongoing series of internal "Continuing the Conversation" – these are internal meetings with OPS members who represent almost every rank and every unit – including specifically themed meetings with members from the following demographic groups; Asian, Women, Black/Racialized, and LGBTQ2S+. These meetings included 690 OPS members in the past month alone.

In each of the internal and community meetings we talked about a shared vision for a healthier, safer and more inclusive city in which the community and the police would solve problems together.

There was mutual recognition of the need for better policing to resolve longstanding complex internal and external trust issues.

There was also mutual recognition of the need for better integration of OPS internal efforts and efforts with our community partners to solve increasingly complex community safety and wellbeing issues.

There were important discussions about the need to better share information and resources as well as creating shared goals to achieve shared outcomes.

Finally, there were meaningful commitments from community members, community-based organizations and OPS members to be actively allies and partners in accomplishing the shared goals and outcomes.

SOMERSET ST. WEST HOMICIDE

I will now provide an update on a series of a critical incident that occurred last Friday morning in Centretown – it involved a rapid succession of violent attacks and the rapid deployment of police resources to the area.

These events brings into focus the core frustrations and aspirations of the vast majority of the community members and the OPS members in all those meetings.

On Friday morning, 64-year-old Carl Reinboth was stabbed to death on Somerset St. West just blocks from the Eccles St. health facility where he worked as a harm reduction worker.

From everything we have heard about him, Mr. Reinboth was a good person - a dedicated, community-minded and caring individual who was always there to help the most vulnerable people in our city. His death will be felt by many.

Within a short period of time and only a short distance from the homicide scene, a second person was similarly attacked. This elderly man survived and is listed in serious but stable condition.

Community members called 911 to alert police to these attacks. There was a quick, professional and courageous by OPS members to the multiple scenes in this unfolding deadly event – this included the local Centretown NRT and CPO. As a result of the combined efforts of the community witnesses and the responding officers a male was arrested near the second crime scene. OPS Constable Dave McCulloch made the actual arrest – the combined efforts of the police and the community likely prevented more crimes and victimization.

Throughout Friday and over the weekend, the OPS was continuously working with the local Somerset Street community stakeholders to address short, medium and long terms issues associated to the violent crimes:

- Short Term – the Homicide Unit and the Victim Services Unit are working to support the victims and their families while the Centretown NRT and CPO

Lemieux have been trying to provide reassurance to the most impacted residents and businesses including the Somerset Community Centre and the Chinatown BIA

- Medium Term – the Centretown NRT and CPO supported by relevant OPS units will assess and address the recent violent street crimes in the area - there was another stabbing homicide in almost the same area in November.
- Long Term – the OPS have been working with local community stakeholders, City of Ottawa agencies and other community partners to improve community safety and wellbeing in the immediate area and across the Centretown neighbourhood

Here's a message that I received over the weekend from Grace Xin, the Director of the Chinatown BIA that demonstrates the professionalism and compassion of our OPS members as well as the quality of the community partners our members are working with:

"We are very touched by the police response. From Inspector Bryden, officer Ali Toghrol, NRT team officer Charles Benoit, and our beloved officer Stephanie Lemieux to the officers who were working at the crime scenes, they all actively reached out to provide support and displayed the force's deepest care for the community. I can't tell you how much it meant to the small business owners and employees, who are under tremendous stress from the pandemic and now are traumatized by the homicide right at their doorstep."

And this message from Carole Sinclair, Manager of Harm Reduction Somerset West Community Health Centre – an email that she sent directly to OPS Officer JF Morin:

"Hi Officer Morin. I wanted to email to say thank you for your support on Friday. I'm not sure you were aware at the time but we spoke at the crime scene on Somerset, I was the one providing you with the victim's emergency contact information as his manager. Not sure if you recall but a while back you, myself, Dawn and Inspector Zackrias had pho across the street from there, back when you both were involved in the injection site liaison work. Your support during a traumatic and hectic event for me and my staff on Friday was excellent, and it helped that I recalled you from our lunch, and the supportive and collaborative relationship we built during that time. Your colleague who took the statement from my co-worker was also wonderful although I do not recall his name. It was a great moment where the relationship building we do when we are able to can play such a powerful role during a crisis, and it helped to see a face that was familiar and trusted. I wanted to acknowledge the phenomenal work you and your colleagues did, and thank you again. Thanks, Carole."

In consultation with the Crown, the accused male has been charged with second degree murder and attempted murder for the second stabbing. The OPS and the Crown will continue to consider all options to appropriately address the needs of the victims, their families and the accused.

The events that unfolded on Friday were likely intersecting with the social determinants of health which underpin most crimes.

The World Health Organization has identified the following 12 social determinants of health; income/social protection, education, unemployment/job security, working life conditions, food insecurity, housing, early childhood development, social inclusion/non-discrimination, structural conflict and healthcare.

The OPS is part of the community – both the police and public care deeply about preventing crime and victimization while also trying to help every person and every neighbourhood improve the social determinants of health.

This is the core of the City of Ottawa’s Community Safety & Well Being plan.

This is the core of the OPS’ 2021 Change Budget to:

- Address gender-biased violence and violence against women with a new work plan that is guided by the city’s frontline responders
- Co-produce a Mental Health Response Strategy where our community partners are taking the lead
- Provide more viable solutions to preventing, reporting, investigating and resolving workplace sexual violence and harassment
- Expanding our neighbourhood policing strategy into Ottawa’s suburbs and the rural areas
- Developing and delivering anti-Black and anti-Indigenous racism training to all OPS members
- Reviewing and modernizing our internal HR systems and competency framework; and
- Investing in the health and wellness of our members so they can be more resilient when they serving the community.

These organizational, cultural and individual changes will take place while our members continue to address a range of every day public safety issues. That is why the OPS has commenced the following operations:

UNSOLVED HOMICIDE TASK FORCE

Our Homicide Unit launched a task force aimed at solving unsolved homicides. These unsolved homicides undermine public trust and confidence in the police, they contribute to the ongoing traumatization of the affected families and they can result in escalated violent crime. The victims in these crimes are primarily young men from marginalized and racialized communities.

In fact, it was meetings with the Black, Somali and Muslim leaders along with the mothers, families and friends of homicide victims over the last year which inspired and informed the task force strategy.

The feedback from these community members recommended that the OPS increase the amount of the CrimeStoppers rewards, have Arabic and Somali translation for all related OPS information, diversify the OPS members in the Homicide Unit and utilize the Neighbourhood Resource Teams to develop more trusted community partnerships.

We will never forget the victims of homicides and all of these cases remain active. This new Task Force is the next step in our mission to solve these homicides, support the victims' families, hold the perpetrators accountable and improve the safety of all affected communities.

Improving public trust, providing heightened duty of care to the victims' families and improving community safety and well-being in the most impacted communities will all be important outcomes from the efforts of the new Task Force.

TRAFFIC SAFETY

Our Traffic Unit officers have been busy developing and carrying out traffic education and awareness plans for the spring and summer. Just this past weekend our officers laid 81 tickets for speeding including 2 for stunt driving. One driver was caught stunt driving for his fourth time.

We received words of encouragement for this activity from many in our community including Councillor Egli:

"Thank you for your assistance on this issue. My community appreciates it."

In the coming weeks there will be a series of OPS traffic safety campaigns aimed at cycling safety, E-scooters, bike thefts, speeding, unnecessary noise and stunt driving.

The work of our Traffic Unit officers over the course of the entire pandemic has been outstanding – they have truly been at the forefront of addressing community complaints and Councillor concerns on a daily basis.

HATE CRIMES

Our Hate Crime Unit continues to work with all communities – but particularly with those experiencing the highest number of reported hate incidents. The Hate Crime Unit has recently increased its efforts with the Asian community due to the escalation of anti-Asian hate incidents.

Our Hate Crime Investigators have also been working with the Crown prosecutors to secure the conviction of a man who had repeatedly vandalized a Buddhist temple statue in the city's east end. The man was found guilty of threatening and harassing people at the temple and sentenced to three months jail time, with three year's probation.

A second investigation related to hateful graffiti targeting a young woman at the University of Ottawa resulted in a resolution that was satisfying to the victim.

Our partnership with the Crown's Office has been instrumental in moving these cases forward. In 2020, 24 people were charged with 58 counts of various hate related offences last year.

We have also begun to see success in hate speech investigations targeting members of the community and towards members of our service.

Last summer, a man was charged with mischief after displaying and uttering hateful anti-Islamic remarks in the Byward Market. He was charged with mischief and has pled guilty.

Last weekend, officers responded to a fight at a downtown shelter. During the course of the incident one officer was bitten by the accused. While being restrained the accused began making sexually explicit and misogynistic comments toward the only female officer that was assisting in the arrest.

Later while being guarded at the hospital he targeted a black officer and made hateful racist remarks towards the officer. With the approval of the Crown, the individual was later charged with hate motivated offences against our officers.

The City of Ottawa and the OPS are fortunate to have one of, if not the best, Hate Crime investigators in Canada, Detective Ali Toghrol.

I want to reiterate that the OPS has zero tolerance for any hate-motivated incident – this includes those directed at vulnerable community members, elected officials and serving OPS members. We urge all people to report hate related events to us so they can be fully investigated.

DYMANIC ENTRIES

Here is another example of how the OPS is listening, learning and changing in real time. At the last Board meeting, I announced the completion of a review of the use of Dynamic Entries which included a decision to pause the use of dynamic entries solely for the preservation of disposable evidence – this was accompanied by enhanced efforts to demonstrate improved duty of care, public trust and community safety and wellbeing.

Earlier this month, there were increased community complaints of illegal drug dealing which was having very negative impact on the community around Frobisher Lane. The community reached out to our Heron Gate/South Ottawa Neighbourhood Resource Team (NRT) for help.

The NRT then began a joint operation, which included our Drug Unit. The drug trafficking was narrowed down to a specific unit in a Frobisher Lane building.

The investigation ended with a search warrant at an apartment where five people were arrested and the seizure of a large quantity of controlled substances along with drug packaging, scales, Canadian currency and mobile devices were seized.

Here is a letter from a community member that was sent to me in the immediate days following the execution of the search warrant;

I would like to highlight the outstanding work and professionalism displayed by the members of the Ottawa Police Service involved in the events that took place in our neighbourhood. Early one morning, my wife and I were woken up by the sound of the drug warrant being served a few houses from our residence. As this is a relatively quiet neighbourhood, we stepped outside on the front porch and saw police activity.

Almost immediately, a plain clothes officer approached our house to reassure us that all was secure and that there was not anything to worry about. The officer in question also apologized for the noise, which in our eyes was completely acceptable and more than reasonable given the circumstances. Later in the afternoon several members of the Neighbourhood Response Team went door to door to explain to all residents what took place and to reassure the neighbourhood.

All NRT officers were extremely professional in their approach, and seemed to be extremely well received by all our neighbours. I could hear laughs, kids playing with the officers and lots of smiles! The outreach conducted as a result of the police operation was a complete success in my eyes.

EMPCA PROVINCIAL AUTHORITIES

Since the onset of the COVID pandemic, the OPS has worked under the leadership of Dr. Vera Etches and in support of Ottawa Public Health (OPH) along with our municipal and provincial partners. This was the case again when we are asked to implement new Provincial public health orders that were announced over the course of April 16th and 17th 2021

Since the onset of the border operations, the OPS has been working closely with OPH along with local and interprovincial stakeholders to assess any local public health and public safety impacts.

Based on local public health assessments and the inputs of our partners we have NOT used any of the extra enforcement measures within the City of Ottawa.

Regarding the interprovincial border restrictions, we have made daily adjustments to our border related operations to achieve optimal health outcomes while ensuring the free flow of traffic and essential service providers.

We are currently deploying officers on a rotating schedule of checkpoints moving throughout all City of Ottawa interprovincial crossings on a daily basis, until the expiry of the Provincial Order.

I am grateful for the efforts all OPS members involved in the planning and implementation of these operations. I am also grateful for the partners who helped us to manage this difficult set of circumstances and the positive feedback we have received from leaders such as CHEO President Alex Munter:

(INSERT SLIDE of Alex Munter's Tweet - "Thank you @OPSchiefSloly and your @OttawaPolice team for working around-the-clock yesterday and in real time today to adjust and improve. Lots of positive feedback today from hospital staff.")

We have been and will remain focused on our stated goal of ensuring our education, engagement and enforcement actions support improved public health outcomes. We will remember and respect the concerns of our most marginalized and racialized communities about the disproportionate negative impacts that they have experienced during the pandemic. We will also do our best to enable compliance with the EMPCA – including the recent restrictions of interprovincial travel.

We recently received a letter from Dr. Vera Etches on behalf of Ottawa Public Health, which was shared with OPS members and I would like to take a moment to share a portion with you:

I'd like to recognize how paramount the work you've been doing has been to keep our residents safe. OPH knows that we can always count on you to show up in times of need with professionalism and dedication to serving the residents of Ottawa. When unprecedented levels of cooperation are called for, your organization is there to support us.

Like all Ottawa residents, OPS members are struggling to keep themselves and their families healthy while providing 24-7/365 essential services to the million people living in the continent's second largest municipality. The intensity and complexity of the pandemic is increasing. Despite these growing challenges, the OPS will continue to do its best individually and collectively.

CHAUVIN CONVICTON

I will conclude my presentation with some reflections on the convictions registered last week in the criminal trial of former police officer Derek Chauvin.

We have all been doing our very best to deal with an incredible and unprecedented array of crises – Board members, OPS members and community members alike. We have all been deeply affected by the COVID pandemic and its global and local economic impacts. We have also all been deeply affected by George Floyd's murder and its global and local social impacts.

And as the whole world watched the guilty verdicts handed down in the trial, the OPS was reaching out to our local communities that may be impacted. First and foremost, we listened to our community partners as they shared their feelings – we heard and felt their sense of relief, grief and/or disbelief. We also wanted them to know we would support expressions of local protest....but that we wanted to help the participants in any such demonstrations to be healthy and safe.

We stand with all local and international communities who have been impacted by the tragic events surrounding George Floyd which shone a spotlight on the historical and current reality of systemic racism in policing, the justice system and society.

As police service members, we are sworn to serve and protect the community – all members of the community without fear, favour or bias. We must be part of the solution – we can never afford to be seen as part of the problem. That is why we must all reflect deeply on these events south of the border in order to consider how we can continue our efforts to improve conditions here in the nation's capital.

Our oaths of office require that push ourselves even harder, individually and collectively, to continually demonstrate the highest levels of duty of care in each encounter with the community members – to continually (re)build the highest levels of public trust with all communities.

The Police Service Act legislation that governs all police operations requires OPS and the City of Ottawa to form truly integrated community partnerships....partnerships that will better prevent crime, reduce the number of people who enter the justice system and co-produce improved community safety and wellness outcomes for everybody - especially for the most vulnerable, victimized and racialized members of society.

Every person, organization and institution can and should do more to help prevent such human tragedies as the murder of George Floyd. That said, the OPS must first and foremost do our part to address all forms of systemic discrimination within our organization.

Much has been done here in the OPS and the city of Ottawa. But we all know that much more needs to be done. We need to do more, do it better and do it with more urgency. We can only do this together - with our OPS members, our Board, our partners and our community.

Thank you – merci beaucoup.