

Full comments to Ottawa Police Board Finance and Audit Committee 2020-11-09

(A shorter version of these remarks was made during the 5-minute delegation speech.)

A single spectrum is not enough for this discussion. We do not all fit the "Defund the Police" - "Give them all they ask for" paradigm. I am in the "Examine all spending under the new vision before adjusting service delivery and changing funding" group. Which is not so catchy.

As you can not see me, I should tell you I am a middle age, middle class, home owning, white women living in one of the suburbs.

I like many the things I heard about change in the OPS under Chief Sloly and commend him for the efforts he has made in the last year. There has been significant progress, but we are asking for warp speed change and we are at bike path speed.

Position: I cannot truly support OPS budget as presented because the OPS and board have not engaged residents consistently throughout the year and I do not see funding to increase consultation.

I need to see you break out how consultation will be different in 2021.

We have several new initiatives under way including Neighbourhood Resource Teams, new tech, and new de-escalation and anti-racism training. I see no funding committed to consultations with the many city stakeholder groups to assess the success of those programs.

I heard Chief Sloly state that the service and the board are committed to discussion about mental health support which would have police at the table but not at the head of the table. Again, I see no funding for that work.

My first ask is funding the development of a new community health intervention plan

Funding for that the community mental health initiative needs to be highlighted in the same way the mental health initiative for staff is highlighted. I do not know what the dollar figure is, so it is hard to comment on if it is woefully low, about right or just plain missing from all sections of the city budget.

Building a new approach to community health interventions will not be a small project.

You and other Ottawa partners will need staff time to research historic trends. There is a need to have a neutral team of facilitators, room booking, public presentation costs, even coffee and snacks. If it is buried in the details of the budget, please bring it out before the budget discussion with the whole board.

If it is not in your budget, the chair of the OPS board and the chief need to make a public delegation at the public health budget discussion to increase their funding to do this work. This was part of the idea behind the motion at council a few weeks back. My expectation is in 2021 your budget would fund the work. For budget 2022, the coalition will be presenting a funding model where some of the funding comes from your part of

the city budget. Depending on service delivery model, money and responsibility would be moved to Ottawa Public Health or some other department for annual funding.

Realistically **based on how our city budgets work, there are less than 6 months to get draft ideas into the 2022 budget.** This is late spring and summer work, not fall work.

My second ask is “ask for our help”.

Tell us what specific tools you need to remove bad apples from the force. It is clear you do not have the tools you need.

Tell me if we need to lobby for expeditious time to trial, increased power at the local level or strong national policing code of conduct. I will lobby on our behalf, but you are the experts. Point me at ways to support you so together we can change police culture in Canada.

My third ask is to fund more transparency.

Transparency is a high value task for building a better relationship with the community. It cannot be an off the side of the desk project for leaders to do in their "spare time." Break out the costs to make consultation a core function of all staff.

Let me discuss the recruiting training process as a specific example.

Your social media campaign on the recruitment process has been fascinating to watch. Every candidate I have seen profiled has been exceptional. They will clearly make our Police look more like our city. Please share that information more widely on your main engagement tools. Have recruits and new hires talk about the training process (good and bad). I want to hear how they are learning to de-escalation tense situations. I want to know they are talking about dilemmas face in the field before they get there. I need to know how you are training them from the start to be mentally resilient, to manage their mental health and to ask for help when they need it. I suggest you create a "The People of Ottawa Police Service" social media channel(s) and rotate a wide variety of people through it on a weekly basis.

You need to manage your brand. You cannot escape the negative stories that will come out as we go through a culture shift and some people are forced out due to violent, inappropriate, or criminal behaviour. You can and should highlight the behaviour you want more of. Share your story.

My fourth budget request is to invest in explaining your budget in plain simple language.

You are working in a regulated environment and which is unique among the other departments in the city. You have legislative constraints which are not known to the public and may not be clear to all councillors.

For example, it is hard to support the hiring of more officers when I have not heard complaints about too few officers. In contrast, I have a clear idea that we need more paramedics because I have heard about their staffing challenges through out the year.

I have heard, as rumour, that Ottawa Police has 2 officers devoted to community mental health already but they are always overwhelmed. I see nothing stating the workforce will be adjusted to add officers and support staff to this community focused team (the discussion does mention increased staff for internal mental health support). I expected that would be part of the interim stage and would be a highlight of the change budget. Please break out how mental health of the public will be addressed in 2021.

You also have not explained why IT is critical to removing wasted time and effort of staff which is a budget saving overall. I recall there was something about radios not working between our emergency response teams in the past and I see that some new tech like license plate readers has come along. But you need to talk more to build your case before the draft budget is presented. It is a constant process. Tell your story in words, not accounting. People get the problems of working with old gadgets because their work will not pay for an upgrade. Use that shared experience to build your case.

About the budget process and the presentation deck

Please consider collecting and reporting on the race backgrounds of those who attend consultations. I am saddened by the slide in your budget deck which highlights a diverse group of officers but shows them at public consultations only speaking to older white folks like me. We need to see you at a residents meeting in an area with many police interactions, meeting with racial justice groups and hanging out with black and indigenous youth. Listening, not talking.

In conclusion, I would love to see Ottawa instantly pivot to having a separate mental health team outside the police budget and reduce the police budget accordingly. Yet I understand why we cannot do this instantly.

You have not made a strong case in this budget to show that the change has started or will start in 2021. So, I echo the concerns of groups asking, "how long must we wait?"

The Chief's words that this is a change budget is only meaningful as we see the changes come to life.

I wish I believed we were less than 3 deaths from starting new non-police mental health intervention team. My fear is we are more than 10 deaths from getting started.

Please make transparency part of the process across the board so we see changes both small and large as they happen. We cannot have a better budget discussion on a budget if it is presented in a style only accountants understand. Our senior high students should be able to understand and discuss the police budget based on the public presentation. You need to tell your story better to increase legitimacy and trust.

Thank you for your time today.

Miranda Gray
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