

Chief's verbal for May 25, 2020

Merci beaucoup, chair, thank you very much.

First of all I'd also like to join you in recognizing the work and contributions of member Suzanne Valiquette, and I wish her every success in her new endeavours. I'm grateful for her leadership, she brought a lot of great insights, important contributions, and she facilitated some very important discussions.

So this is a little bit of a different format, and I'm grateful for allowing a little bit of a variation to get us through an important series of presentations.

We have a lot to discuss today, but before we get started, I wanted to take a moment to thank the members of the Ottawa Police Service for their continued dedication and hard work, as well as our community partners who help us to deliver our core policing in the city. We continue to work with, and in support of, Ottawa Public Health during this COVID crisis and I wanted again to recognize the outstanding leadership of Dr. Vera Etches.

COVID 19 Response

We are moving into what we are calling the stabilization phase of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Our stabilization plan will be focused on people, service and finances. The health and safety of our residents and our members remain the top priority for us during this pandemic plan; we are also working diligently on managing the financial impacts of COVID 19, and have been doing so with the Board as well as City staff and Council.

We continue to work with all of our partners to manage this ongoing pandemic, including City By-Law, Paramedics, Fire, the healthcare community as well as trying to navigate our way through the various emergency measures that have been imposed at the local, provincial and national level. We want to thank everyone for their ongoing contributions to keeping our city safe and healthy.

The following is an overview of the crimes and social disorder trends we have seen, along with some examples of our operational responses over the last month.

We continue to see increases in mental health as well as family and neighbour-related disputes. The good weather, the relaxation of emergency measures and the reopening of the economy are all creating new opportunities as well as new public-health challenges, as well as increasing calls for service. This adds new complexities for our members on virtually every front.

We have worked with our partners at OCTEVAW, Crime Prevention Ottawa, Interval House and the Eastern Ontario Resource Centre, which helped us to develop an Unsafe at Home program, a secure text and online chat service that gives women living with domestic violence and abuse the support they need during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has resulted in a very successful level of engagement. We have had more than 4,800 visits to the website, and more than 300 people have reached out for support during the first month of operations for the chat program, doubling the expected volume.

We will continue to focus first and most on community engagement and education and we use enforcement last and least.

To-date the Ottawa Police Service has issued five tickets and four warnings under the Emergency Services Act, relating to the pandemic.

Our Traffic Services team recently launched Operation Overwatch, to address speeding and dangerous driving across the city. I would suggest dangerous driving, speeding and stunt driving is probably the number one public complaint that we get. Our Traffic Services team and our OPS frontline officers have issued over 823 tickets, this includes 36 vehicles that were impounded and the drivers charged with stunt driving.

Lastly, we started a campaign for the Asian community, impacted by COVID-related hate incidents. Our officers worked with the community to create posters in multiple languages to help those impacted get the help they need. To be clear while this has directly affected our Asian community members, it affects everybody in the city. Nobody, and no community, should experience this type of behaviour in our city.

Commercial break and enters have increased across the city, and with the community's support we have been able to identify and arrest a large portion of those committing the crimes. We continue to provide Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design resources to the business community. We are working with social services in the not-for-profit sector to prevent people from falling between the cracks, and into criminal activity.

Our Marine, Dive and Trails team are out ensuring that boaters are adhering to safety regulations, over the Victoria Day weekend they stopped more than 120 boats, and issued 57 tickets. Over the past weekend, they stopped 136, with one impaired charge being laid. Our officers were checking for the necessary safety equipment on board, as well as the good conduct of the drivers.

Our investigative and frontline officers continue to conduct street-level investigations; this has resulted in multiple arrests, along with the seizures of proceeds of crime, a variety of drugs including cocaine, fentanyl, hydromorphone, along with a number of crime guns. To-date the Ottawa Police Service has seized 45 crime guns, that's in 2020 alone. Ottawa has seen a total of 11 shootings so far in this city in 2020, compared to this time last year when there were 26 shootings.

Workplace Fatigue Strategy

Moving from the crime, traffic and disorder trends, a very important aspect is how we support our members with health and wellness to allow them to operate safely and effectively.

One of the most critical Board and Service priorities is the health and wellness of all of our OPS members.

I'm pleased to announce that the OPS has partnered with the Ottawa Police Association and the Senior Officers' Association to develop and implement a Fatigue Management Strategy. This strategy is an overarching evidence-based approach to: facilitate member recovery; improve member health and performance; and improve overall individual and public safety.

The impact of this strategy will also positively effect service delivery and public confidence. The Command, Senior Leadership and myself, have already taken the four-hour training session earlier this month, and it will be rolled out across the organization over the coming months. The training was excellent.

I would like to recognize OPA President Matt Skof for his leadership role in developing this strategy and pulling together the stakeholders. The OPS and I are looking forward to working closely with both the OPA and SOA on this important initiative.

New Neighbourhood Resource Team

In May we saw the rollout of our latest Neighbourhood Resource Team (NRT) in the Byward Market/Lowertown area of the city. Despite the challenges of COVID 19, we remain fully committed to advancing the Board's priority to increase neighbourhood policing, and the Service's priority to double the number of deployed NRTs in the city; from three that were deployed in 2019, to three being added in 2020, bringing the total to six.

The next two teams, in Centretown and Bayshore, will be launched sometime in the fall.

Good work being done

This is just a sample of the feedback that OPS members received since the last Board meeting:

"I am writing to you in advance of the 14th anniversary of the suicide of my 18 year old daughter. I should have written to you a long time ago, but I want to tell you that I will never forget how the members of your force handled the situation that day. They were all very professional, but more importantly, were sensitive and kind to me as I screamed and cried while they and other emergency personnel worked to try to save my daughter's life. Other people were present - the coroner, firefighters, and paramedics - but it is the police officers that I remember. I will always be grateful for what those officers did that day and if it is possible, after all this time, I ask that you pass on my thanks to them."

"I was moving my belongings from my old home, following an abusive relationship. Two officers were present during this time and exhibited professionalism, situational awareness, dispute management expertise, sensitivity, and objectivity. They made me feel protected during this ordeal. Officers like these are a benefit to Ottawa."

I am very proud to be the Chief of an organization composed of such professional, dedicated and compassionate members. Deeds speak, and this is the benchmark of service that we all strive to.

Promotions

I would like to take a moment to congratulate Isobel Granger on her promotion to the rank of Superintendent, and her recent assignment in the role of leading the newly created Respect Values and Inclusion Directorate, which you will hear more about later.

I would also like to congratulate Troy Froats to the rank of Sergeant. Troy is a long serving member of the Ottawa Police Service, has the respect of the frontline officers, has a history of policing in his family, and is going through a very difficult personal time. His promotion meant a lot to him and his family, and to the Service as a whole.

This concludes my verbal report.