

Sept. 23, 2021

Mayor Watson

City Council

Police Services Board

Re: Ottawa Police Services Budget

We are writing to you as community leaders who have actively worked with OPS over the last 30 years to make our neighbourhoods safer. We formed strong partnerships with the Community Police Officers, the Neighbourhood Officers and many of the Executive members over this time. This partnership improved safety in our neighbourhoods and transformed them, we saw calls for service decrease. We have informed on, developed & implemented new initiatives together as partners.

We were also there to tell the OPS when we felt a change in their direction was going to be detrimental. For example we were consulted on the Strategic Initiative Program a couple of years ago at OPS' request, we advised and cautioned on OPS adopting certain changes, some of which have now been reversed.

Lately we all hear many requests in the media to defund and dismantle the police. **We urge you not to do this.**

Can things be done differently, better, more efficiently? Absolutely. But determine what that way is first and make sure it is appropriate and that it will build on the successes before you dismantle everything first. Any new alignment in OPS' delivery of its mandate should not come at the detriment of neighbourhood policing.

In the late 1970's and the 1980s the mental health system we had was dismantled. Facilities were closed and grand promises were made that services would be provided in the community. That did not happen and there was a dramatic rise in people living on the streets. A system was dismantled, with promises of wonderful care, but without an adequate alternative system or funds to replace it. Decades later we see the devastating results of this and there is still no adequate system in place.

We are concerned that this defunding of police will be the same. We have no adequate mental health systems in place, they are insufficiently resourced and funded. The police end up as the default system.

Please use this next year to build a way to transition these mental health calls to a system that actually works so that police are not tasked with these calls and that less of these issues escalate to the crisis levels we see in the media where excessive force is used. These instances are a

failure of the system to prevent crisis events from happening. We urge you to continue the work on a multi-agency response to issues related to mental health, drug & substance abuse calls.

Community Policing works! It provides an opportunity for the residents and businesses to meet police in positive ways at neighbourhood events, at the local food bank, serving breakfast at shelters and supportive housing sites. This is important for all people, including new Canadians, who may have had negative interactions with police in their own countries or here. This work changes perceptions and attitudes on all sides. It also allows the Police to get to know the neighbourhood and in the past has provided help to our neighbours before issues have escalated out of control.

Two of us attended the on-line session on the budget that was held last week. This was not a friendly space to share ideas and certainly not a friendly space to show support for police. People who felt the budget was ok were negatively responded to by others who felt it was not. It was certainly not a format where “everyone’s” voice matters” and where everyone felt they could speak.

There is support within neighbourhoods for adequate resources, Community Policing and the work the NRT teams are doing.

Neighbourhood groups stand by to advise on any changes to OPS' service delivery that may affect neighbourhood policing. We expect that any changes to policing approach will be done in consultation/collaboration /alongside community and neighbourhood partners

Sincerely

Cheryl Parrott & Wayne Rodney - Hintonburg Residents & Co-Chairs Security Committee,
former member Crime Prevention Ottawa Community Forum

Stephanie Strudwick - West Centretown resident, former District 2300 Neighbourhood Watch
Co-ordinator, former member of the Dalhousie-Somerset Safety Committee, former 2-term
member of Crime Prevention Ottawa Community Forum, and former 1-term member of Ottawa's
Needle Distribution and Recovery Consultative Group

Grace McClelland-Crout – Carlington resident and former Neighbourhood Watch Coordinator

Lucie Marleau – Crime Prevention Vanier, Neighbourhood Watch Program Volunteer
Coordinator - Vanier