

“Creating a Culture of Community Safety” Report on the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners Community Consultation

June 16, 2015



The report that follows summarizes the discussions that occurred at the Community Consultation on “Creating a Culture of Community Safety” hosted by the members of the Saskatoon Police Commission on June 16, 2015.

The purpose of the event was to provide a public forum at which residents of Saskatoon could comment directly to members of the Saskatoon Police Commission about safety and related issues. The Consultation attracted 95 people to the event with an additional 189 people listening in via live streaming.

The Consultation featured three components:

1. A presentation by Saskatoon Police Chief Clive Weighill
2. A Panel presentation on safety issues
3. Table discussions between residents of Saskatoon and Police Commissioners and/or panelists.

The presentation by Chief Weighill and the Panel is available online as noted later in this report. For those interested in providing their opinions, the same four questions asked of attendees are also online following the two videos. The comments from residents who attended the June 16 Consultation and those collected online will be captured in the final report to the Saskatoon Board of Police Commissioners.

A recap of the most prominent and/or the most commonly identified issues, as gathered to date, follows.

1. Police Chief Clive Weighill:

- The Saskatoon Police Service is divided into three primary components – reactive, proactive (with significant overlap between the two) and administrative.
- Areas such as school resource officers, cultural resource officers and community liaison officers are important components as these represent a vital connection to neighbourhoods and communities, enabling people to know the officers that work in their areas.
- The 640-person Saskatoon Police Service is comprised of the following components: patrol (45%), criminal investigation (23%), administration (18%), asset management (10%), Chief’s office and public affairs (4%).
- Of all calls for police service, 20% involve criminal activity and 80% involve non-criminal activity.
- The major changes in crime in recent years, as noted by the Police Chief, revolve around the Internet, drugs, social issues including mental health and addictions, traffic growth and population growth in the Saskatoon region.
- The most recent Inshtrix survey indicates that 92% of Saskatoon residents are somewhat satisfied or very satisfied with the Saskatoon Police Service.
- The Police Service indicates it has found a number of areas where efficiencies have been captured.
- *Note: The full address by Police Chief Weighill with accompanying slide presentation is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hNIFibDsZ3o>*

2. Community Panel:

- Tracy Muggli – Saskatoon Health Region
- Candace Wasacase-Lafferty – University of Saskatchewan
- Candace Skrapek – Saskatoon Council on Aging
- Father Andre - Str8up Program
- Sultan Ali - Open Door Society

A summary of their comments:

- For seniors, the perception that the community is not safe is greater than the reality that statistics would indicate. This perception is driven by the growth in population in the city and the increased feelings of vulnerability as people age.
- The Police Commission, the Police Service and City Council were recognized for the collaborative approach that has been taken with health authorities in addressing the care of the most vulnerable citizens. Much of that work is directly related to mental health and addictions issues.
- Building relationships between organizations is pivotal to creating a stronger sense of community safety.
- Public money can be saved by finding the right supports for people at the right time. Examples of this are the reductions in unnecessary use of emergency rooms and the decreased number of arrests of people who have not committed a crime but are intoxicated in public.
- Gang activity has become an increasingly serious issue in Saskatoon. Organizations such as Str8up have had notable success with people leaving gangs by addressing the “prevention and intervention” steps.
- Despite declining overall crime rates, as measured statistically, there is a strong sense that the level of violence is on the rise.
- The answer to “do you feel safe in your neighbourhood?” is more often “no” than “yes”.
- The country of origin for new Canadians has a significant impact on the reaction they have to police presence, driven as it is by their experience with police in their country of origin.
- The external perception of Canada is that it has high standards of living and is very safe.
- The idea of “which parts of the city are unsafe” is often driven by reputation more so than personal experience.
- Partnerships between groups, with specific outcomes identified, are the best path forward.
- The 80% of police service time that is spent on “non-criminal” activity represents the area in which relationships are built which is very valuable as part of a strategy for creating a culture of safety.
- For older adults, frauds/scams are the top crime with elder abuse being second.
- Creating stronger connections within neighbourhoods is very important to creating an enhanced sense of community safety.
- The traditional strategy of “simply locking them up” is not one that will work because the origins of these interactions are typically quite complex. Saskatoon Police Service was noted for a significantly improved approach to these issues.
- Education about police services on the part of communities, and education about communities and the growing diversity of those communities by police, will be increasingly important to creating a culture of safety.
- Relying on the police service alone to create a culture of community safety will not work. As evidenced by an increasing number of partnerships, it is the interaction of a range of agencies that has demonstrated the greatest impact.
- *Note: The address by the Panel is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQdJAKy0yXQ>*

3. Community Members / Consultation Attendees:

a) *Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? Do your friends and family feel safe?*

- While statistics indicate that crime, overall, is dropping, the incidence of violence and violent incidents seems to be the same or greater.
- One characterization of safety was that “men say they feel safe, while women say they don’t feel safe”.
- The incidences of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls take place in Saskatoon, just like every other city, and significantly impact perceptions about safety.
- There were many conflicting views about whether people felt “safe in their neighbourhood or community”.
- Some report avoiding areas or situations they perceive to be less safe.

b) *What tells you whether your neighbourhood or city is safe?*

- Factors that make people feel less safe include:
 - The part of the city in which the respondent lives,
 - Media reports on crime and violence,
 - Feeling isolated from one’s community or neighbourhood, and
 - Not knowing one’s neighbours.
- Factors that make people feel more safe include:
 - The part of the city in which the respondent lives,
 - Connections with neighbours and area residents,
 - Knowing the police officers who work in their area, and
 - Seeing a visible police presence.

c) *Who has responsibility for creating a safe community?*

- We all do. That includes police, many support organizations, community associations, clubs, health services and governments.
- Community building needs to happen wherever we live.
- Parents have a responsibility to do their best.
- There is no one / single group that can do all of what needs to be done.

d) *What should be the focus of the police service and other groups going forward?*

- Ongoing training of police officers and community resource officers on the demographic and cultural changes that have taken place in Saskatoon
- Parent Watch and parent councils sharing information
- Continuing the partnered programs with sufficient funding to enable them to move forward
- Addressing mental health prevention and treatment
- Engaging the police service in education about poverty and its related issues
- Focusing on traffic
- Focusing on gang activity
- Encouraging neighbourhoods residents to know each other
- FASD support
- More funding allocated to prevention programming support by the city, provincial and federal governments
- Redeploying police services with additional patrols/beat cops is a welcome addition to change perceptions of “unsafe” communities
- Educating new Canadians about the role of police
- Community events that will foster positive gatherings including block parties and/or mini-powwows
- More media focus on positive stories in our community vs. negative (unsafe) stories
- Police presence and visibility in communities
- Getting to know your neighbours
- Achieving cultural diversity of police officers
- Greater resources that result in having more police on the street