

## **Downtown Safety Meeting Overview**

### **The Panel**

- City of St. Catharines – David Oakes, CAO
- Niagara Regional Police Service: Shawn Dowd
- Niagara Assertive Street Outreach: Shelly Mousseau, Gateway (NASO)
- Niagara Region: Cathy Cousins, Director Homelessness Services & Community Engagement

### **Questions & Answers**

1. Is there a way to install more CCTV cameras downtown – perhaps in locations that are experiencing more vandalism? Per an article in the St Catharines Standard in 2020 the City and the NRP partnered together in order to install more CCTV cameras downtown.

Have these cameras been installed and if so what is the impact they have had?

- **Niagara Regional Police has 30 cameras in Downtown core**
- **Currently in areas of Church/Queenston, Welland/Geneva, Niagara/North**
- **6 more have been approved & added to Geneva/St Paul, Geneva/Church**
- **Existing cameras have been upgraded to HD in 5 locations**
- **There are specific criteria to be met for grant funding of cameras, Downtown Core has substantial coverage that is real-time monitored by individuals and can be moved to focus on different areas**
- **Though cameras can be a deterrent they are typically used for gathering evidence - they have been used approximately 100 times in the past year for court hearings.**

- **Any time there is an opportunity to apply for more camera funding it is taken advantage of**

2. A number of our small business and property owners have experienced a surge in vandalism (one business owner has had his windows smashed 6 times in the last 3 months) and repeat vandalism, during a time that has been very challenging for our small business owners. These additional expenses and attacks are catastrophic.

Unfortunately, the response some of these businesses have received from the NRPS when they report has not been as empathetic or as efficient as expected.

Is there a way to encourage follow up with the victims so they know if someone was charged or not?

- **Police are encouraged to follow up for every case. However, you should ask for incident number and you can call to request a follow up if you do not hear from someone**
- **Officers are dispatched on priority system, sometimes it takes longer for an officer to attend but competing priorities can affect response time, there are not enough officers to arrive to every call immediately**
- **Remember, though Officers are encouraged to show professionalism at all times, they do face similar frustrations to business owners**

Is it possible to create a vandalism relief grant for small businesses? Similar to the graffiti program that allows small businesses that have been a victim of crime to retroactively be reimbursed for the cost to fix or replace damaged property.

- **Vandalism hits entire city making it difficult to provide complete assistance - grant program can be looked at by Council**
  - **There is a Graffiti program. The challenge is the budget is \$15,000/ year that provides \$500 matching to the victim. Once it is depleted there are no funds left and it becomes difficult to manage.**
  - **Could the DTA put together a vandalism program and provide funding to businesses? *SCDA Response – per the Municipal Act a BIA is not allowed to use the levy to fund improvements to a private property.***
3. Will the NRPs be looking to apply for the Community Safety and Policing Grant Program
- **Yes they are, if they receive it funding will commence April 1**
  - **The funding will be spent on initiatives such as: Community engagement, people in crisis, human trafficking, domestic violence & mental health**
  - **They have a staff member who identifies grants available and applies for them**
  - **Another announcement for a new grant just came in & they are currently applying for it, mandate to never leave money on the table**
4. Sometimes when NRPs are called for an instance involving mental health it can be handled in very different ways. Because Officer Rusty and Officer Rob seem to be very adept at responding to and de-escalating these situations could new officers job shadow them for a day or two to learn from them and to help meet the community.

Asked with

5. Officer Rusty and Officer Rob are much appreciated by all downtown and the rapport they have built with community members is invaluable.

Would it be possible to add an additional team member?

- **NRP always looking to enhance the service model, with community engagement in the forefront.**
- **General patrol officers are deployed to certain areas of the city throughout the day, with a heavier presence during bar hours**
- **Yes, they go out with Rob and Rusty to shadow during training.**
- **Additionally, every police officer goes to Onatrio Police College and learns Crisis Intervention and De-escalation Techniques**
- **Rob and Rusty know everyone Downtown and have the benefit of a good rapport and that is why they typically have a better response as they are a familiar face. This is something that takes time to build for general officers.**
- **Police partner with AGCO, Fire, Regional Bi-law, City Bi-Law, SCDA and others to address issues that affect Downtown Bars to assist and assure the members of the community and reduce calls for damage, mischief, & fights.**
- **They also meet regularly and have placed more officers downtown as a result.**
- **Plain clothed enforcement also have presence downtown**
- **Several arrests and seizures have occurred recently - look to media releases on NRPS site for more information**
- **Downtown Core has the most police presence out of the whole city, remember force is required to patrol the entire city.**

6. We want to thank the City for looking to have the Canada Post boxes and the Hydro boxes wrapped with an anti-graffiti wrap.

Could you tell us a little more about this and the expected time frame and if there are any plans for the lampposts or bike racks to be painted?

- **The anti-graffiti wrap will be completed in the next couple of weeks**
- **Working with Alectra to update the program to bring artists to boxes,**
- **Would be willing to paint lampposts and bike racks. They will look at in 2022 as part of their budget**
- **They will push to have them included in a grant in addition to improved lighting in the Downtown**
- **Team is working at regional and provincial level to reinvigorate Downtown through different initiatives**

7. The rubble from the Welland House Hotel is having negative impacts on our downtown (from a negative perception, damage caused from the rubble and more), what is the timeline for this to be cleaned up?

- **It is understood that the rubble is a frustration, felt by the whole city**
- **Building was designated 1.5 years ago as a heritage building and is considered one of the most important heritage features for the City of St. Catharines**
- **The fire does not change this significance and because it is designated there are certain requirements to follow in it's demolition**
- **The pile of rubble doesn't mean it was demolished, it was knocked down for public safety**
- **Before it is properly demolished and cleaned the rubble will need to be sorted so important historical artifacts can be preserved**

- The property owner required a heritage consultant for the plan before demolition permit is issued, it is issued by council.
- The week before this meeting, all reports were provided to planning and building staff through heritage planner which will go through heritage permit advisory committee
- It has taken longer than hoped, the intention is that a permit will be able to be issued November 29th which will allow for deconstruction
- City working with owners as best as they can
- Hopefully, weather permitting, a 6-8 week process to get the site cleaned up for the next step.

8. The perception is that homelessness, mental health challenges, drug addiction and crime are increasing (specifically downtown St Catharines).

Is this visible in data and reports as well and if so what is being done to address it?

- Many people might have one but not the other, or maybe all 3, need to compartmentalize each issue
- A survey showed that many people gathering downtown are not homeless but are there for social inclusion. The pandemic has exasperated this for many
- Point in time count in March 2021 - showed small increase in amount of people but an increase in the length of stay - reflects the challenge of housing costs
- As a result have increased outreach workers, expanded shelter system, operating a first time regional direct shelter & isolation shelter as part of response to this
- 2 additional facilities are coming, one late December for chronic homeless individuals 15 beds - 25 beds, other late January 25

**bed permanent supportive facility for chronic homeless individuals**

- **18 months ago RFP to provide street outreach through the Niagara region (included Raft, Gateway, South Ridge and Port cares), allowed to increase outreach to 17 workers, 7 in St. Catharines alone**
- **Partnership with 211, businesses can call to identify Homelessness or if you have a concern for someone**
- **Leave a message with voicemail and it goes directly to outreach workers, typical response time is within hour**
- **Needle messes - upsetting to Downtown, options to deal with it include using the Ping St app for St. Catharines, take a photo of it and it will geolocate to the area and someone will dispatch clean up. You can also contact Andrew with Streetworks directly and he can assist you in removing, they have multiple community clean ups 2 times a week they pick up needles throughout the Downtown Core**
- **CTS - Consumption Treatment Services at 105 Queenston Street started in 2018 and since opening 700 overdoses have been reversed thanks to this facility.**
- **Instead of just asking people to leave it can help to provide different locations for individuals downtown to go that will be useful for their needs**

9. The current data from the Region and Built for Zero - seems to show a consistent number of homeless in Niagara. Can the number be broken down by municipality to help us better understand the numbers for St. Catharines? Is there also information on the reasons for homelessness such as mental health, job loss, addiction?

**1. Niagara Region is early adopter of HIFIS (Homeless Individuals and Families Information System), a CRM that tracks homeless population information.**

2. **30% of clients identify St Catharines as home community in overall and chronic list**
3. **Top 5 reasons for homelessness were: Financial hardship, conflict with spouse or partner, issue with landlord, addiction or substance abuse, unsafe or unfit housing**

10. A number of our businesses have had negative interactions with individuals who may be homeless or have a mental health challenge.

Are there tips on how best to interact or who should they call if they feel unsafe?

- **If you ever feel unsafe call 911**
- **Otherwise call 211, the operator will ask several questions to put you through to proper resources.**

And can you tell us about MCRT and COAST or other programs available to support those with mental health needs?

- **MCRT - Mobile Crisis Rapid Response Team**
- **COAST - Crisis Outreach and Support Team**
- **Longstanding partnership with the Niagara Canadian Mental Health Association that dates back to 2011 Coast - MCRT in 2015**
- **Both programs are examples of partnership in responding to problem in community - mental health is a crisis in society for some time**
- **From 2010 - mental health related calls have gone up 300% which is why MCRT was created.**
- **MCRT team with mental health social worker and police officer trained in crisis intervention**
- **Operates in St Catharines & Thorold, then Niagara Falls and NOTL**
- **7 days a week 12pm - 12am**

- Goal is to deal with 911 person in crisis, often mental health or addiction related with goal of diverting person in crisis into community care once safe to do so
- Looking to expand further in St. Catharines due to need
- COAST is secondary - takes referrals, officers trained in crisis intervention that able to refer and urgency may not be needed
- 911 communications will get calls from crisis lines (example suicidal)
- MHART program - Mental Health and Addictions Response team, similar to but paramedic with Mental health nurse, funded by Niagara region and nurse is in kind
- Niagara EMS is a partner - they currently work and strategize with them regularly