

BOARD OF POLICE COMMISSIONERS
MINUTES
November 14, 2005

PRESENT: Commissioner Trevor Johnson, Vice Chair'
Commissioner Ernestine Gouthro
Commissioner Brad Johns
Commissioner Linda Mosher
Commissioner Jim Smith

REGRETS: Commissioner James Perrin
Commissioner Greg North, Chair

STAFF
AND OTHERS: Supt. Tom Jones, RCMP
Deputy Chief Tony Burbridge, HRP
Ms. Chris Newson, Legislative Assistant

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1. CALL TO ORDER

The Vice-Chair called the meeting to order at 12:37 pm in Halifax Hall, 2nd Floor City Hall, 1841 Argyle Street.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES - October 17, 2005

MOVED by Commissioner Johns, seconded by Commissioner Mosher, that the minutes of October 17, 2005 be approved as circulated. MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

3. APPROVAL OF THE ORDER OF BUSINESS AND APPROVAL OF ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS

MOVED by Commissioner Gouthro, seconded by Commissioner Johns, that the Order of Business be approved as presented. MOTION PUT AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.

4. CONFLICT DECLARATIONS - NONE

5. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

5.1 STATUS SHEET ITEMS

5.1.1 Governance

No update at this time, to remain on status sheet.

5.1.2 Rewards for Major Unsolved Crimes

No update at this time, to remain on status sheet.

5.1.3 Use of Photo Radar and Traffic Light Cameras

Commissioner Johnson advised that the Province responded they were not available for the November meeting but would like to attend the next meeting (December 12). Mr. Johnson to confirm with the Province.

6. PRESENTATION

6.1 Graffiti

Councillor Mosher introduced Mr. Gary Martin, Manager, Community Response Team, Governance & Strategic Initiatives. She advised that graffiti is a growing problem in HRM that needs to be addressed.

Mr. Martin, assisted by Mr. Peter Myatt, on secondment to the Community Response Team from the Halifax Regional Police, presented a PowerPoint presentation on Graffiti.

Mr. Martin highlighted the following points:

- Graffiti is done by skilled artists who practice for months to perfect their “tag”. They start as “toys” (rookies) then progress to “taggers” then “bombers” when they have perfected their craft. HW (Home Wrecker) and CBU (Chemical Bomber Unit) are the two most popular “tags”. As the Bomber gets better, the ‘tags’ become “pieces”. There are more than 200 active Bombers in HRM.
- Most graffiti artists are known to frequent the Kyhber Centre on Barrington Street and are not all teenagers. One tagger was 31 years of age.
- \$1 billion per year is spent on graffiti issues in Canada, \$1 million (or more) in HRM alone. One tagger had placed over 1000 tags in HRM at a cost of \$50,000 in property damage.
- The challenge to “taggers” is to see who can put out the most daring, creative, biggest tag. Tags are appearing in dangerous places such as on top of road signs across highways.
- Taggers are encouraged to “stay illegal” which means to target any place that does not give you permission. This was seen on a website frequented by taggers: “*Visual Orgasm*”. Bombers (taggers) say they will continue to “tag” and do not care that it is illegal.
- A Professor at NSCAD (Nova Scotia College of Art and Design), who teaches a Masters Program, once gave a presentation on the evolution of graffiti and commented that it should be their God-given right to express themselves. The Dean of NSCAD has said that none of his students would tag but some NSCAD students have been arrested. HRP has visited NSCAD.
- The key to stopping/deterring graffiti is to remove it as quickly as possible as taggers will “tag” an already “tagged” spot. If the graffiti is removed promptly, it is unlikely the tagger will choose that spot again as no one would see his work.
- There is overwhelming support from the business areas to have a By-Law that requires the removal of graffiti within 24 hours.
- Graffiti is one of the main reasons for the rapid social decline of a community as people feel uncomfortable and unsafe in an area with graffiti.
- Graffiti comes from pop culture and is a sub-culture. There are different types of graffiti: Hip Hop (85% of all graffiti), Gang (5%), Hate Crime (8% and growing at an alarming rate), Latrinalia (1% - public washrooms) and Folk (1% - John loves Jane).
- Some areas have a wall (space) dedicated to taggers and as long as the graffiti is

limited to those allocated locations, the taggers are permitted to continue. Nova Scotia Power on Lower Water Street does not discourage taggers from putting graffiti on the walls at that location. There is also a “free” wall at BC Silver school in Spryfield and taggers will have that wall as long as other areas of Spryfield remain clean.

- Taggers do not tag memorials or churches nor will they tag over another artists work. Murals will be coated so that if there is graffiti it can be easily washed off without damaging the mural.
- Surprisingly, a lot of graffiti is not seen unless you are looking for it. A water tower in Timberlea was tagged but was not reported by the community, it was reported by the water commission who happened to notice it.
- Some businesses that sell paint/supplies are giving contractor rates to taggers as they buy in quantity. One business person who sold paint and nozzles was upset that HRM was going after graffiti as it was his livelihood.
- Graffiti is not ART. Graffiti is a CRIME and causes rapid urban decay.

Comments from the Board:

Commissioner Mosher commented that the Community Response Team has been working hard yet HRM is not doing enough to stop graffiti and graffiti is getting out of hand. She explained that there is an element of youth that have no respect and murals are now being tagged as well as Walker’s Funeral Home, a water tower in Cowie Hill, every power pole on Glenora Avenue, oil tanks and houses are also being targeted. She added that HRM cannot just continue to clean away the graffiti. She cited Quinpool Road as a success story in regard to controlling graffiti and added that they now have a Quinpool Road Business Commission. She advised that a Graffiti By-Law, similar to Vancouver/Banff’s, could have a stipulation that if the graffiti is not removed from a property within ten (10) days, then the municipality would clean away the graffiti and charge the cost to the property owner by adding that cost to their property tax.

Commissioner Smith arrived at 1:22 pm.

Following discussion on the matter by the Board, the following motion was placed:

MOVED BY Commissioner Mosher, seconded by Commissioner Johns that the Board of Police Commissioners direct staff to prepare a report for the December 12th meeting regarding the enhancement of HRM’s graffiti strategy to include the possible establishment of a Graffiti By-Law (similar to that used in the cities of Vancouver and Banff) including enhancement initiatives such as: offering free paint to repair property damaged by graffiti, up to \$500 per calendar year offered by HRM toward paint for a heritage property damaged by graffiti, organizing a community “paint-up” or other community initiatives.

Councillor Mosher strongly recommended that eradicating graffiti become a priority matter for Regional Council.

In regard to the motion, Deputy Chief Burbridge commented as follows:

- Graffiti is a criminal offense. It is known that there are businesses in HRM giving “deals” to the perpetrators and with research those establishments can be placed on a “black list”.
- If the parents of a seventeen (17) year old cannot control their child’s actions in regard to graffiti then how can Council or the taxpayer do anything.
- Charging businesses for not cleaning graffiti in a timely manner would be charging a business that has already suffered property damage and then receives an additional bill on their property tax for the municipality to rectify that damage. Perhaps consideration should be given to placing the cost of that clean-up on the property tax of the parents.
- A By-Law is being suggested when there is already a criminal code that the Provincial Court does not enforce (in regard to graffiti). People must be held accountable for their actions.

Sgt. Tom Jones, RCMP, added that graffiti is a criminal offense but once the matter goes to court it is out of their (HRP/RCMP) hands as the perception is that graffiti is not that heinous a crime. He added that if there is a hate crime attached to a criminal offense (damaged property), police have to pursue the hate crime as opposed to just dealing with the graffiti.

Councillor Smith suggested that graffiti be designated as “unsightly” and dealt with under the Dangerous and Unsightly By-Law and HRM’s own staff. He added that the Provincial legislature has to provide a definition of graffiti as the current Dangerous and Unsightly Act does not have graffiti listed as “unsightly”, therefore, HRM cannot demand that those areas are cleaned.

Councillor Johns commented that HRM has taken a stance on graffiti as it has dedicated a Community Response Team to deal with the issue. He expressed concern that graffiti is an underlying cause leading to other problems and there appears to be “organized” graffiti artists. He suggested that a request be made to the province to place an age restriction on the purchase of (paint) spray cans. There may be undue hardship to volunteer groups as non-profit organizations cannot continue to clean-up the graffiti. He explained that people are tired of the graffiti and residents (in the Sackville area) are “hanging out” to find out who is doing the tagging.

Deputy Chief Burbridge responded that he understands the level of frustration. He added if the Board would like HRP to take a harder stance, it would require the dedication of HRP

resources (going completely undercover to follow the kids etc.). If twenty-five (25) kids were charged tomorrow with the criminal offense of property damage, the expected result would not occur if the courts do not take the matter seriously. He added that HRP needs to work with the Community Response Team to obtain an intelligence file that would help identify the ring leader. He added that HRP will make a commitment to work with Mr. Martin to gather this intelligence. Mr. Martin confirmed that there will be three members on the Community Response Team and hopefully one Administrative Support person.

Sgt. Jones added that to enforce the seriousness of this crime, education is required and the HRP/RCMP have to get the message to the schools (Junior High level). He further commented that if the communities are not "cleaned" of graffiti, there will be such a rapid decline that it may not be possible to bring the communities back.

Councillor Mosher advised that there are School Liaison Officers (from HRP) at the schools now, and perhaps they could talk to the students about graffiti.

Commissioner Johnson suggested that if the intention is to call for a By-law on graffiti, the debate and development of a strategy should be done at the Board level first, and then put forward as a strong policy to Regional Council.

Councillor Johns suggested that the "unsightly" (Dangerous and Unsightly Act) aspect is a good alternative and should also be given consideration. Mr. Martin explained that paint on a building is at the discretion of the owner and that is why it does not go through the Dangerous and Unsightly process. He further clarified that there is a strategy regarding graffiti that has already been approved by Regional Council.

Councillor Johns requested that the current graffiti strategy accompany the report.

Councillor Smith requested the information be brought back to the Board as he has not seen the proposed By-Law and would not be able to vote for it to go forward to Council without reviewing the information.

MOTION PUT AND PASSED.

7. REPORTS

7.1 HRP

7.1.1 Staff Report, November 2005

Deputy Chief Burbridge advised that names would no longer be included in the Staff Report regarding statistical information. No further action required.

7.1.2 Quarterly Interim Statistical Overview - 3rd Quarter

Deputy Chief Burbridge advised there has been a decrease in crime. No further action required.

7.1.3 Training Activity, October 2005

The report was circulated for information. No further action required.

7.2 RCMP

7.2.1 Halifax County District Detachment Volunteers

The report was circulated for information. No further action required.

7.2.2 Halifax County District Detachment Crime Prevention/ Victim Services Report

The report was circulated for information. No further action required.

Councillor Johns requested a report regarding tickets issued by the integrated traffic services as well as a breakdown in the percentage of revenue raised for HRM. He also requested information on what areas have requested the service, the number of tickets issued and whether or not there is possible duplication of service between the RCMP provincial and RCMP integrated force specifically in the jurisdiction of the series 100 Highways.

Deputy Chief Burbridge will provide the statistical information and agreed that a monthly update under the reports section of the agenda regarding the Integrated Traffic Services division can be provided. Superintendent Tom Jones will provide similar information from the RCMP.

Councillor Smith suggested that all volunteers in the COPS program be notified that it may be possible for them to register as an association and thereby be eligible for some tax discounts. Deputy Chief Burbridge will look into this matter.

8. ADDED ITEMS - None

9. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for December 12, 2005.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned into the In Camera session at 2:16 p.m.

Chris Newson
Legislative Assistant