

SAULT STE. MARIE

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## Opioid 'pressure' falls on police: Mayor

Author of the article:

**Brian Kelly**

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Chief Hugh Stevenson and Mayor Christian Provenzano speak at Sault Ste. Marie Police Service's satellite office at Station Mall in June 2019. BRIAN KELLY

Mayor Christian Provenzano is leaving Sault Ste. Marie Police Services Board with a stark observation.

Policing is getting harder, driven in part due to opioid use.

The two-term mayor attended his last meeting as a member of Sault Ste. Marie Police Services Board on Jan. 30. He is not running for re-election this fall and wanted a city councillor to take his place and get experience on the board. Ward 3 Coun. Matthew Shoemaker is his successor.

“It’s not getting any easier to provide policing services,” said Provenzano during the recent meeting. “The opioid epidemic has certainly affected our community to a great degree. There’s a lot of people that need care and support that don’t have that care and support. The downstream consequences of that sometimes are an increase in non-violent criminal activity, but also as we’ve seen recently, an increase in violent criminal activity. That pressure ultimately falls on our police service.”

Provenzano told board members he had served for more than seven years.

“I’ve got a lot of mixed feelings about the fact that’s coming to an end, but I think it’s the right thing,” he said. Chief Hugh Stevenson lauded Provenzano’s “unchallenged passion for both the short- and long-term benefits and support of this city.”

“You may have had a rough ride to begin with, but you’ve certainly finished off fine,” said board member Ian MacKenzie. He was referring to Provenzano losing the 2006 and 2011 federal elections as a Liberal candidate before defeating

incumbent Debbie Amaroso to become mayor in 2014 and easily winning a second term in 2018.

“You’ve put in so much time and that’s time away from your family,” said board chair Lisa Vezeau-Allen. The Ward 2 councillor has known Provenzano since 2008.

“I’m really honoured that you’ve always been in my corner and I’ll continue to be in your corner,” said Vezeau-Allen. “We do have some great things (in Sault Ste. Marie), but we also have some challenges. I think the best thing that we can do as people in position of leadership is to recognize those challenges, be open and honest about those challenges and try to continue to work together.”

Provenzano wanted to exit the board in advance of the Oct. 24 municipal election so he could offer mentorship to Shoemaker and Coun. Corey Gardi who is succeeding him on the Public Utilities Commission’s board “to support them and answer any questions they have” before he leaves municipal politics.

[btKelly@postmedia.com](mailto:btKelly@postmedia.com)

On Twitter: @Saultreporter