

# Crime Running Wild in the Sault: Some councillors respond

By **Dan Gray** - October 26, 2020



Last week, we asked the population of Sault Ste. Marie how they would address the crime, drugs, and overdoses running rampant in the city.

Since then I have spent hours talking, meeting and compiling complaints, and many amazing suggestions about the ongoing issues.



How to fix different crimes and where it seems to be the worst.

During one of these interactions, I witnessed more than a dozen individuals of all walks of life go in and out of a problem house in the core.

Witnessed individuals going through recycling boxes and getting on bicycles which were most likely not theirs.

We spent time and reached out to councillors, city officials, and police for both comments and to advise them we will be inviting them to a panel to be held in the near future.

Officials inside city hall have not responded to our requests for comment as of the time of writing.

The Mayor was advised of our request as well as the CAO and other individuals inside city hall.

Many councillors either didn't respond or advised they weren't in a position to answer.

However, three did and they are working to help address the issue.

Councillor Sandra Hollingsworth says she's not only concerned but is taking action to hopefully address part of the ongoing issues.

"I can tell you this that I am concerned. So concerned that I asked the Mayor for an update on the potential idea of building a level 3 rehab centre. It is my understanding that it will be on the council agenda not next meeting but shortly after," said Hollingsworth. "In addition, I've been in contact with Stacey Peterson, CEO of Fresh Start (a rehab centre in Alberta) who is world-renowned to learn how to start a rehab. I am just doing some fact-finding."

Sources within the community and some research tell us this idea has been broached at city council. It has been on and off the agenda more than once in the past five years.

Residents are frustrated and disheartened their concerns aren't being heard.

"If this was happening up on the hill or in the P patch it would be dealt with," said a concerned resident who lives near Gore and Albert.

"We call the police and they don't come or they come too late," said another.

The residents are afraid to go on the record as they already have trouble with some of the addicts in the neighbourhood. They fear for the safety of themselves and their homes and families if they put their names in ink.

Councillor Matt Shoemaker has received numerous calls about these issues during his time as an elected official. He has called and spoken with the police chief and put a motion on the table for the next council meeting.

"From a council perspective we already spent upwards of \$25 million per year on policing and do not have significant funds available to add to our budget in addition to that," said Shoemaker. "I do have a motion on Monday's city council agenda to ask staff to come up with a plan to work with a Downtown Association on increased security or surveillance in the downtown area which is seen a spike in what is classified as petty crime."

During one of the meetings with residents, surveillance did come up. Cameras like the ones in London, England to help police the area was one suggestion.

Many of the residents have also paid out of pocket for either security systems or security companies to come and watch over their properties.

They claim to see more security patrol cars than police patrol cars in a night.

Although not a solution to the drugs and overdoses Councillor Luke Dufour advised us there is some more help coming for illicit drug users who have overdosed. The help is coming from the District Social Services Administration Board for which he is the chair.

"At our last meeting, we approved a plan to train and supply Narcan to our local paramedics," said Dufour. "They will perform this service in addition to firefighters who have had the training and supplies for a number of years."

It is evident the issues and anger run deep in this community. Sault Online hears you and some councillors hear you.

Unfortunately, Mayor Provenzano and others within city hall although made aware of the issues seem to just want to ignore it. At least they seem not to want to acknowledge the issues publicly.

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### **Dan Gray**

A native of Centre Wellington, Ontario, I have worked as a freelance journalist all over the province of Ontario. Most recently I ran a local news page in my hometown of Fergus, Ontario. I look forward to bringing my experience covering breaking news, municipal matters and general interest stories to the team at Superior Media and communities we serve.

