

Q&A – Week 12 – Where candidates stand on policing

By **Dan Gray** - June 25, 2022 @ 9:00 am



Sault Police Service had a home in Jamestown surrounded, May 18, 2022 (Dan Gray/Saultonline.com)

Our site is going into week eleven of our question-and-answer feature in which SaultOnline poses a question from the community to those running for both Mayor and Councillor.

As of this week, we no longer include those currently sitting in these positions, instead, we have only approached those listed in [the City of Sault Ste. Marie website](#) who are running for the respective positions.



As always the question is put forward early in the week and a deadline of Friday at noon is given for responses to be submitted. The responses are listed in the order in which they were received.

This week's question from the community was-

1. Would you support building a new police station, if so, where? or would you like to refurbish the one that exists.

2. The police budget is one of the largest impacts on the taxpayer, but the police have not hired any new positions in almost 20 years. Would you support hiring more officers if it helped reduce the crime in the community?

3. How would you like to see the crime and underlying issues addressed in our community?

Do the answers here match yours? Let us know in the comment section.

Mayoral Candidates –

Matthew Shoemaker

As most are aware, I have been very vocal about the need for a new police station. I want that to be downtown to the greatest degree possible. I do not think refurbishment of the existing one is a good option given the way things have changed technologically since that place was built in the 1970s and expanded on in the 1990s. We have a police station built for a service that existed 50 years ago. We need a station for a modern service.

As for hiring more police officers, I support it. I am on the police board and know that over the last 20 years, our comparator communities of North Bay, Peterborough and others) have had an increase in the base number of officers for their police services at an average rate of about 10% over 20 years. Ours hasn't increased at all in 20 years despite a significant increase in the calls for service. You'll hear more on this issue soon.

As for the underlying issue of crime, which most would agree is linked to addictions and mental health issues, I would like to see two things done. First, we need to aggressively lobby the province for expanded mental health and addiction services. I have a good personal and working relationship with Ross Romano and I'll be working closely with him to get the provincial supports we need locally. Second, the evidence I've read is that supervised consumption sites like they have in Timmins and Sudbury reduce overdoses, reduce calls to emergency services like police and ambulance, reduce infections, and reduce the spread of diseases like hepatitis and HIV. I would work with the province and the federal government to get the necessary approvals to get our fair share from both levels of government so that we have the same services they offer in our neighbouring northern communities.

Tobin Kern

1) When looking at the infrastructure needs of the police, stakeholders need to consider a number of factors. Firstly, the practicality and feasibility of refurbishing the existing building must be assessed. If it is feasible to refurbish, then the other factors can be considered against a new build, including service improvements, cost of both projects, and the present and future greenhouse gas emissions (carbon footprint) involved in both proposals. My guess would be that if it is feasible, refurbishment of the existing facility would be the most cost-effective, in terms of cost and carbon footprint.

If a new build would be the best solution, all locations should be considered, and expertise from policing and community service perspectives should inform where the best location would be.

2) Hiring more officers if it reduced crime is the literal million-dollar question. In order to support an increase in costs, I would have to see that basically all strategies have been exhausted to reduce crime using existing resources. This would have to include the trial of best policing practices, and best collaborative practices with other community services. Ottawa has implemented a foot patrol in high-crime areas, as have other jurisdictions. I'm not certain that this would be best suited to our community, but I certainly would like to see many strategies employed before I supported cost increases.

3) No one likes crime. The fact of the matter is, that healthy, properly housed, employed people are less likely to commit crimes. As such, I would like to see more initiatives that follow Ontario's Community Safety and Well-Being framework be developed and implemented. There are grants from time to time, from the Ministry of Community Safety and Corrections Services, for such projects that take a holistic approach to reduce crime, including addressing the social determinants of health of all citizens and include multidisciplinary approaches to address the complex causes of crime. There are also a number of initiatives that have been undertaken by other communities that we could study and learn from.

In British Columbia, and likely other jurisdictions soon, SAFER supply programs are being trialed to reduce the number of harms and deaths caused by the consumption of ever-changing and uncontrolled street drugs. I am not an expert in crime nor addictions, but as a layperson, I feel I have yet to see an adequate proposal that would protect people better, and better decouple organized crime and small crime from the consumers of non-prescription drugs better than a SAFER supply program. With available expertise in this town available, perhaps a town hall to discuss which approaches our community should advocate for is warranted.

Ozzie Grandinetti

The biggest issue facing many Cities today is safety. Many people don't feel comfortable or safe in their communities, and the same can be said in many other Northern Ontario communities.

Sault Ste. Marie needs more eyes and ears on the street; foot patrols, social workers, police, bylaw officers, and security guards, who can proactively help people in need, as well as arrest those who are breaking the law. I am very concerned with the way addiction and crime are increasing. Residents in SSM have a right to be free of crime and have a safe city to live in. We need to move the Ontario Addiction Treatment Centre (on Queen Street) out of the downtown core, we need to have homeless shelters but not in our downtown core.

I don't feel like now is the right time for the City to invest in a new police building, I would rather refurbish the existing building as it will cost a lot less than building a new one. I am sure that the consultants/engineers will work the numbers to make it look like it is not worth refurbishing the existing building. I am sure that staff will put the fear into Council that a new building is needed because that is what they do best! I am very supportive of setting up a satellite police station within the downtown, with little to no cost, as we have plenty of vacant space, even in City Hall, since with hybrid working arrangements in place, I am sure half of the city hall is sitting empty. I strongly support hiring more officers if it helped reduce crime in the community, I would need to investigate the stats, as I am not sure adding more officers on the street will reduce crime. With the Catch and Release provisions of Bill C-75, criminals know that they are only getting a slap on

the wrist once they are arrested. The latest incident in the west end is a prime example of that as these individuals should of still been in jail for a murder that they committed roughly 10 years ago. The legislation needs to change in order for our police force to be effective. I think that crime prevention will reduce crime and save lives. Most crime prevention programs show that police are leaders and are in touch with the community's needs. Hot spot enforcement and community involvement would be a start at reducing crime. Crime prevention should be led by the local leaders, and the Federal and provincial governments. As Mayor, I would play a key role in ensuring that residents are consulted and their ideas are taken into consideration, and solutions are developed. I would like to see criminals face higher penalties for crimes, but that starts with the Mayor and Council lobbying the government and teaming up with the other Northern mayors to voice our concerns with the current situation.

Long term, we need all levels of government to collaborate to provide safe and adequate housing for everyone who needs it, addiction and mental health programs for those who want them, and stiffer penalties for those engaged in criminal behavior. Most of the crime and addiction issues need to be fixed at the federal and provincial levels, including amending the Criminal Code provisions on possession of illegal weapons, introducing a minimum sentence for firearms offenses, and changing the Catch and Release provisions of bill C-75. I will work with the provincial, federal and local law enforcement to take steps to reduce crime and build resources and supports for the people suffering from addiction.

Donna Hilsinger - No Response Submitted

Ward 1 –

William McPhee

1. First I would like to see what the cost of renovations to the existing building would be. I would also consider how much the life of the building would be extended by doing renovations. Then weigh that against the cost and longevity of a new building and see what makes more sense. If it makes more sense to build new then yes I would support it, and I think the current location is good.
2. I think we have to look and see how much overtime they are currently paying. If there is a lot of overtime currently then hiring some more officers would actually help to reduce the budget because the overtime hours would be reduced.
3. There are some areas of the city that could benefit from increased police presence or more frequent patrols. A big part of the issue with crime in our community and others is that some of the criminals are convicted of a lesser charge than what they are originally charged with and as a result, they are back on the street sooner. I think that this is an issue that is beyond what a municipal council can do and we need to push the Provincial and Federal governments to really look at overhauling the justice system.

Sandra Hollingsworth – No Response Submitted

Brent Derochie – No Response Submitted

Ward 2 –

Lisa Vezeau-Allen

1. Would you support building a new police station, and if so, where? or would you like to refurbish the one that exists.

The current building is a city-owned asset and the provision of the property is under the responsibility of the city as it manages other city-owned physical assets. Communication has been underway with both Police Services, Police Services Board, and the city. It is not simply the discussion of a new building – it is an ongoing and thorough process that involves various stakeholders; including legislative requirements. It is not the work of just one group or an individual. It is the responsibility of the municipality to provide law enforcement and it is the responsibility of the local Police Service Board to determine objectives and priorities for police services as such may involve the examination of physical buildings to ensure that policing can be delivered for the safety and well-being of our community. It is the responsibility of both elected officials and the local Police Service Board to work collaboratively to determine the needs of our local force and assist as necessary in the needs assessment process. From the outcome of this process as an elected official, we need to participate and be informed as to the plan and support as needed.

2. The police budget is one of the largest impacts on the taxpayer, but the police have not hired any new positions in almost 20 years. Would you support hiring more officers if it helped reduce the crime in the community?

The budget is developed within the Police Service Board, in collaboration with the Chief and Finance to determine priorities and then presented to Council for approval. Through that process staffing levels can be addressed. It is not the work of one individual, but a committee outside of Council.

3. How would you like to see the crime and underlying issues addressed in our community?

We are seeing collaborative work being done to address this from the Community Wellness Bus, the Downtown Ambassador Program, Sault Area Hospital Crisis Team, and Dynamic Patrols, among other grassroots organizations such as SOYA working in the community. It is not one organization that can tackle, but our work as an elected officials is to be aware of the work being done locally and support initiatives and organizations within our scope of responsibility.

In closing as both an elected Ward 2 Councilor and as a candidate running for re-election I will answer the questions posed by Mr. Gray that directly relate to work I have contributed to or Boards/Committees that I participate with.

Luke Dufour – No Response Submitted

Ward 3 –

Kurtis McDermid

Building a new police station has been a heated topic on and off for some time now and it has become soaked with assumptions and personal opinions. When it comes to location and renovation versus new build there are a lot of questions that need to be answered and the facts need to drive the decision-making before assumptions.

Is the current building unfit for use by current standards either structurally or in terms of use? What are the economic impacts of building a new station versus renovations both long term and short term? We cannot allow ourselves to continue to make short-sighted budget decisions that ripple into the future as we have in the past. We currently feel the economic effects of previous councils thinking only about short-term budgets at the expense of what have now become current crises. Our roads are prime examples of this. We have continually diverted money away from roads and now we are at a point where catching up is becoming a huge economic hurdle to clear. We cannot let other infrastructure decisions reach this same point.

Where do comparable cities with lower crime rates and better quality of life locate their police stations?

What location is both economically wise in terms of operating costs as well as service wise allowing us to give top-quality service?

What land is available and what is the value of the current location?

As far as staffing goes, that is largely the responsibility of the Police Service Board. In Ontario, The Municipal Act and The Police Services Act keep politics out of policing as much as possible and a municipal government's power over this is limited. Politicians like to rant and rave about how they want to change policing but the truth of the matter is that they are perpetuating a false belief that municipal governments have more power than they do over police services. We need to focus on bringing the Police Service Board into the public eye and into public engagement and transparency. We need to connect our citizens to them and drive the conversation about the future of city policing through the body that has the most power to enact change.

That leads me to the underlying problems and crises that we are facing here in The Sault and what our power is within the city council. Police are an immensely important part of the equation but where the municipal government should be shining brightest is in housing, social services and with public works with cleaning up the collateral damage of the crises we face. These are the areas we have the most power within The Municipal Act. I want to support housing and social services initiatives as much as possible and I want to lend my strengths as a business owner dealing mainly with property maintenance to the logistics of literally cleaning up the city. I don't want to get so caught up in the overarching problems of housing, mental health and the opioid crisis that we forget we need boots on the ground and we need them there now. We need graffiti remediation, vandalism repairs, playgrounds that don't have "Out of Service" signs that are older than my 3 children and we need needles and trash picked up. We can talk about policing and we

can talk about crime but we also need to talk about what we are policing and protecting. Jamestown has an unfinished park, our Hub Trail is disjointed alienating big parts of our community, our old hospital and many other buildings are dilapidated and stagnant, storefronts are empty and out-of-town property management groups are buying up properties to let them sit vacantly and create a rental shortage to inflate rental cost on their existing units manipulating local markets.

Let's take a hard look at what we can do to support our police and to build up our city where our police are serving a vibrant, clean, busy, well-designed, and maintained city filled with people, festivals, activities, amenities, and things to do for everyone and aren't busy policing vacant buildings, incomplete projects, neglected infrastructure, and underutilized/empty stages, pavilions and parking lots.

Angela Caputo– No response submitted

Ward 4 –

Marchy Bruni – No response submitted.

Ward 5 –

Matt Scott

My preference on the police services building would be to refurbish the existing one. However, if it were determined that a new building be absolutely needed then I would be more in favour of it being where it is today. The location is close to one of our major intersections and allows a fast response time to any calls in the city. If we were to move it downtown, response times could be hindered by road congestion or a train for example.

I would definitely be in favour of hiring more officers, especially if we could guarantee it would directly impact crime rates. Being appreciative of the fact that their budget is one of the largest spending from a taxpayer point of view, I would make every effort to help offset those costs in other areas.

I believe our police services are doing an exceptional job at handling crime in our city given the circumstances. I would like to see them continue their hard work and efforts while lobbying the higher levels of government for more support to address many of the underlying issues including, but not limited to, increased mental health spending.

Martin Poirier–

1. I would support the recommendation of the Police Service Board.

Whether it is a new building, refurbishing of the existing one, or a combination of those options should be decided by the Police Service Board based on their needs and on a cost/benefit analysis of the different options.

As for the location, I think the operational needs of the police force is the most important factor to consider. To impose a location based on a different agenda – e.g. to revitalize the downtown-, would be a mistake. Could it, for example, affect the response time of the Force in case of an emergency? Here again, it is the Police Service Board that should make that decision as they are the ones that have all the elements to make an enlightened decision.

2.

If we look at the big picture, our population is shrinking. According to Statistic Canada' censuses, our population shrank by 2 515 from 2001 to 2021. Thus, there would need to be really good arguments to increase the number of officers.

That being said, police work evolves and so do our needs. There might be excellent reasons to hire, but that would be to the Police Service Board to justify.

3.

I find the Police Force does a great job at securing our community, and that is what I hear around me. I encourage everyone to thank and support our officers when we encounter them.

Crime is a complex issue. Law enforcement is only part of the equation. I am a firm believer that a dollar invested in prevention goes far beyond one invested in enforcement, but both are needed.

Municipalities cannot by themselves address crime prevention, but they can play a part. Building relations between people in our communities helps in reducing crime by helping people in need having more resources around them, preventing them to resort to unlawful acts. Our municipality does that in multiple ways, be it through sports, arts, culture, events, etc.

Corey Gardi – No response submitted



Dave Mornix – No response submitted

Bi-weekly we will post a scorecard of who answered and who didn't, with a nod to those who participated in the first 9 weeks of the previous format included.

Do you have a question you would like to be asked of your candidates in the weeks leading up to the election?

Let SaultOnline know and our staff will do their best to get answers for not just you, but the community as a whole.

Thank you for choosing us as your source of news in Sault Ste. Marie and the surrounding area.

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.

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