

## Speaking Notes | City Council | Dec. 8

Thank you, Chair Ruth, for your opening remarks. And thank you Mayor and Council for inviting me to speak on behalf of the Edmonton Police Service.

For some of you, this is a continuation of conversations we've had in previous years. For others, our conversations are just beginning. Regardless, I appreciate that we're all here today because of a common goal: **making our city safe for all Edmontonians.**

The landscape of policing has changed, that's something we can all agree on. EPS is not the same service it was a few years ago, and with that comes new community expectation.

I'm humbled and proud to be leading an organization full of hardworking professionals who are working tirelessly to be that change... work that has garnered the attention of police services across the country. By nature of their work they face trauma on a daily basis, but their dedication to making a positive impact doesn't falter.

**Let's be honest, the past two years have been hard on our people.**

As you get to know me, you'll hear me say this often: being a modern police service means balancing support and enforcement. Success isn't just about the number of guns we take off the street or criminals we put behind bars: it's about the number of individuals we help divert away from the justice system toward measured, proven supports.

It's important we don't confuse the two, but we need to recognize that there's an overlap requiring us to address both simultaneously. This is why police need to work in both spaces – we have the legal ability to get to the root of issues on all sides.

**We can't just focus on crime or social disorder: we have to focus on both.** This is what community policing is...this is how we focus on community safety and well-being.

We also need to remember that every crime has a victim, and we need to support them too. Edmonton had approximately 11,300 personal victims last year and over 46,000 properties and businesses victimized. **That's not reasonable – people are tired of this trend and concerned for their own safety.**

This is why we have to balance both ends of our response.

**NEXT SLIDE PLEASE**

Edmonton is growing, not just in size but in scope and intricacy of community needs. When the city expands, so does the complexity of social issues and crime, driving up the level of service they require.

Edmonton is one of the fastest growing cities in Canada – our population has grown by 52 percent since 2000. The city's total tax supported expenditure increased by 259 percent in the same timeframe: EPS budget increases were 234 percent, with operating costs staying consistent at around 15-16 percent of the city's total operating costs.

These increases are aligned with population growth and overall city expenditures.

As well, in 2000 policing made up 12.7 percent of every tax dollar collected; however, in 2019, that dropped to 11.8 percent of every dollar.

In 2019 City Council implemented a funding formula providing stability in EPS' growth proportionate to the city's population and the flexibility to respond to Edmonton's emergent needs.

The formula, which was identified by the City Auditor as a smart and viable way to manage the budget, gives us the foresight to reduce costs and extreme expenditures over the long-term.

This is the reason we've been able to follow the Commission's direction in making substantial changes.

Rather than being reactionary and coming to council with new asks each year, we proactively plan on a four-year cycle – there are few other services that operate on the same strategic system.

Council's motion to reduce the 2021 budget at 2020 levels resulted in a 11-million-dollar reduction over two years. We've adapted within those constraints to manage organizational growth and adjust to the city's diverse needs ... all the while maintaining core service levels through economic downturn and a pandemic.

But let's remember – as we speak – we're managing a 6.2-million-dollar deficit largely due to COVID-19 ... and we're **still not asking for more money**. Our intention is to manage any overspend within existing funds through the funding formula.

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**Calls to police do not stop because of budget reductions or because folks are staying home – the demand remains, and, unfortunately crime and disorder in our city persist.**

Though calls for service have dropped by 7 percent in the last year, we still get an average of 479 calls per day. That's 20 calls per hour and one call every three minutes.

In total, over 446,000 calls went to 911... many of which were triaged by dispatch on the spot. This highlights the importance of a joint dispatch centre.

But what I want to bring your attention to is the fact that even though calls for police service have dropped, we're seeing a marked increase in violence.

This can be attributed to many things – the pandemic, population growth, economic strife, social unrest...

But foundationally, it tells us what we're really struggling with is the lack of a well-integrated social safety ecosystem. These factors have just made it more evident.



Most importantly, we lack a system driven by measurement and clear outcomes that hold **all service providers** accountable for getting people the support they need. Until then, calls for service will continue at an unreasonable pace.

But let's not forget that those attending calls need to have the legal authority to be there... I'll say it again, police need to have a role in both worlds of crime and social disorder.

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We have two interwoven drivers for police service in Edmonton:

- One: Serious, reoccurring offenders responsible for much of the violence in the city. Their presence is apparent in the increase we've seen in violent crime and repeat violent victimizations over the last year.
- Two: Vulnerable and marginalized individuals that become unnecessarily entrenched in the arrest-remand-release cycle, but often fall victim to the feeder systems that drive crime. We see this in the opioid crisis...the growing number of overdoses...and the growing number of encampments around the city.

I want to take a minute to add a personal note of thanks to Mayor Sohi for working on building systems change in Edmonton.

What you're doing will help get us the results we need to start seeing better outcomes for Edmontonians.

All systems need rules, standards and alignment to truly be successful.

A one-size approach to policing does not fit all – this is what we mean when we say, “balance support and enforcement”. **But, let me make it abundantly clear: Edmonton has a crime problem... one that simply moving money around won't fix.**

Downtown Edmonton experienced a 16 percent increase in crime severity over the last four years, while the rest of the city only experienced a 2 percent increase. This is a concerning trend.

Let's take a closer look at transit. Despite Council's commitment to increase security in April, the average crime severity at LRT and Transit centres has gone up.

In 2021, 50 percent of the top 10 occurrence types at centres were violent crime like assault and assault with a weapon. Even with a 60 percent reduction in ridership during the pandemic, these crimes still happened.

Here's a story from a few days ago:

December 7: Security guards respond to check on the welfare of a male sleeping in Coliseum LRT station. The male said he was okay and did not require assistance but appeared to have consumed drugs. A concerned female LRT patron gave him a bottle of pop.

An unrelated male onlooker took offence to the gesture, grabbed her by the back of the neck and threw her against a bench causing injury to her face.

The male then chased the security guard and tried to grab him. The guard was able to break free and retreat into a locked office where the male proceeded to spray pepper-spray under the door. A second security guard was also chased by the male. This guard fell and injured his leg during the pursuit and both he and the female were transported to hospital for their injuries.

Meth highs can be unpredictable, and the resulting behaviour isn't something visibility of security guards will change –our transit guards aren't designed to deal with this, nor should they have to.

Transit aside, here are a few more files:

**File 1:** December 5<sup>th</sup>, a man confronts a woman and her small child at an LRT station by making sexual remarks about the child.

He throws the woman to the ground, makes death threats, steals her phone and runs. He later approaches another woman to trade the phone for cash and threatens to kill her too when she refuses. The man has been a subject of 12 complaints requiring police attendance in the last 20 days, 6 of which ended in charges.

When in custody, he admitted to using meth and being intoxicated during all 12 cases.

He has a history of sexual assault, uttering threats, break and enter, criminal harassment, possession of

weapons, and assault with a weapon.

**File 2:** December 3<sup>rd</sup>, members observed a van driving erratically and conducted a traffic stop. The registered owner had firearms, weapons and controlled drug prohibitions, but members noticed a locked handgun behind the driver on the floor.

The driver is arrested, and a search finds over \$160,000 of fentanyl, \$14,000 of crystal meth, and a loaded, sawed-off rifle in the van. At the individual's residence more firearms, fentanyl and meth were found. The individual was previously arrested in August while in possession of weapons, \$12,000 of cocaine, \$350,000 of fentanyl, and \$60,000 of meth.

**File 3:** November 29<sup>th</sup>, a male suspect robs a bank, flees the scene and subsequently enters a random

residence where he takes the lone female at home as his hostage.

Tactical arrives on scene and professional negotiators assist in the release of the female who suffered serious but non-life-threatening injuries at the hands of the suspect. Police then enter the residence to find the suspect deceased.

**With Edmonton's persisting crime in mind...what measurable community safety or individual outcomes have been achieved with the 11 million dollars redistributed from EPS' budget? What can we confidently say it's improved?**

Edmonton is diverse, and we recognize that to serve Edmontonians we must engage with them directly and



understand all segments of the community – needs vary, as do relationships with police and perceptions of safety.

Over the past year we've spent a significant amount of time listening to community members, partners and stakeholders through our Commitment to Action.

They've told us what they value and what they'd like to see more of from their police service: relationship building; more partnerships; training and professional development; communication and transparency; innovation; community engagement ... and increased visibility.

**These are the asks of Edmontonians – this is what your colleagues...your neighbours...your constituents... are**

**asking for.**

We also recognize that Edmonton's downtown has unique needs too, including business owners and residents. Their lived-experience is also valid but unfortunately, in current circumstances, that experience is often as a victim. As the world begins to open again post-pandemic and people return to work, a safe and vibrant downtown is front of mind.

Both myself and my staff have met with our downtown business and Chinese business communities in recent weeks. They continue to see challenges with fires, cleanliness, theft, assaults, vandalism, and drug use.

They are concerned for survivability of their businesses because fewer people are visiting our downtown. They

want to see an increased presence from police to address these very valid safety concerns.

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Once again, we're confronted with the fact that our siloed approach of addressing social issues one-by-one isn't working.

**We can focus all we want on housing or harm reduction individually... or worse, in isolation... but if we don't make sure other supports are there for sustainable change, these are short term solutions and they won't make a difference.**

**Edmonton has no continuum of services.** Findings in HelpSeeker's recent social impact assessment show that money's poured into housing and addiction, but we miss countless other services that are just as crucial to at-risk populations. The graph in front of you speaks for itself... take a close look at the demographics and services that fall at the bottom.

This is why EPS has come together with partners to create units that better integrate frontline service providers with community agencies. We're doing what's within our power to start bridging gaps and teaming up with impactful organizations we know will hold themselves accountable alongside us.

These partnerships are crucial to our success.

In the case of downtown, we're working with the City of Edmonton, Alberta Health Services and community partners to form new multidisciplinary response teams that will work with the vulnerable population.

Their goal is to break down systemic barriers and connect vulnerable individuals with assistance programs, ultimately driving down calls for police service and showing measurable outcomes for individual's non-criminal needs.

When we have the right people at the table...when we look to those partners doing excellent work in the non-profit realm... we increase our rate of success, reduce overdoses and advocate for lasting solutions.

**This is the kind of police work the community has asked for and receives with the investment they – and you – make in EPS: new ideas, innovative approaches and better, human-centred solutions.**

This is exactly what we've heard from the hundreds of people engaged in our Commitment to Action sessions: they have made this abundantly clear.

Contrary to the belief that our funding is ear-marked solely for more frontline officers and expansion of traditional policing efforts, those dollars give us the ability to build the police service of tomorrow...**one that looks to get to the root cause of crime and disorder, not simply arrest our way into a perpetual state of recidivism.**

And...a service that's leading the country in terms of its work in the community safety and well-being realm.

This work was formalized through the creation of EPS' Community Safety and Well-being Bureau in December 2019: **the first of its kind in Canada**. We reallocated 37 million dollars worth of staff and resources to stand up a bureau dedicated to diverting vulnerable community members away from the criminal justice system and toward community partners.

Recognizing the need for wrap-around services, the Bureau has seen great success in initiatives like the Human-centred Liaison and Partnership (or HELP) unit, where we've created a hub of health, social and justice stakeholders to support community members.

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In the first nine months of HELP's presence in Edmonton, we saw a 7 percent decrease in calls for service compared to 2020. Most of this decrease was found in the same calls for service that our community members are most heavily involved in. We can't completely say that HELP is the reason for the reduction, but I don't believe it's a coincidence.

The key to success of programs like HELP and others coming out of the Bureau is **accountable partnership**. I say accountable because this only works when we partner with agencies with clear objectives and measurable outcomes who are working in a common direction: people-focused solutions driven by data and evidence.



Working alongside agencies like Boyle Street Community Services, Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society, the Mustard Seed, and Alberta Health Services allows us to collectively leverage our expertise, resources and relationships for better outcomes.

This is where relationship and accountability get us...this is where relationship and accountability position community members for success.

Where we've been innovating in relationships, we've also been innovating in technology and process through projects like in-car video and improvements to our records management system. These projects improve police transparency and access to near real-time intelligence that benefits officer and community safety.

We're also civilianizing several positions in our dispatch centre to put officers back on the frontlines where their specific skills and badge are more urgently needed. We value having civilians with diverse backgrounds, skillsets and perspectives within the Service... we're stronger for their contributions.

Alternate funding sources have provided the flexibility to keep EPS innovating. In the spring, the Government of Alberta approved 789,000 dollars for EPS to implement a mental health crisis pre-screening application, HealthIM, on behalf of police services across Alberta.

This app equips officers with evidence-based information and de-escalation tips to create a more empathetic interaction.

HELP was also recognized by the Government of Alberta with 600,000 dollars for community partner agencies to hire civilian social navigators. This boost will expand HELP's capacity to off-ramp more individuals toward independence and sustained positive outcomes.

Creative approaches like the Community Solutions Accelerator have given us an avenue to bring together police, academia and private industry in pioneering forward-thinking solutions for public safety issues.

In 2020, the EPS dedicated tens of thousands of hours in frontline resources responding to and investigating liquor store theft complaints. This is an unsustainable, often violent, trend ... one that puts store staff, customers and the surrounding public at significant risk.

In collaboration with ALCANNA, the EPS and the Edmonton Police Foundation implemented a controlled entrance initiative at several liquor stores. Since the field test, participating stores have seen a 91 per cent decrease in crime reduction.

Most importantly, staff at these locations feel much safer and the risk to customers has been mitigated from the onset.

This joint approach has been so successful that the foundation, accelerator and EPS are looking to use a similar approach to address the rising catalytic converter and auto theft problem.

In Edmonton, we've been down the road of changing programs and moving money between service providers so many times we've lost count. That's how we ended up here. That's why there are so many people falling through the cracks.

There are countless service providers doing excellent work essential to community safety and well-being. EPS has had the honour of working with many of them. We don't want to lose sight of that... but we do want to start focusing on the bigger picture.

Based on publicly available data, we know there's 7.5 billion dollars per year of segmented, siloed funding funneled into the city's social safety ecosystem and allocated on an organization-by-organization basis.

**The issue isn't money – the issue is that the system isn't integrated to maximize social impact.**

Until then – until our systems are better coordinated and we offer a full continuum of services – that's 7.5 billion dollars each year that many of our vulnerable and at-risk populations will never realize the full benefit of and many criminals can easily exploit.

But that's a conversation that goes beyond policing and impacts an entire network of service providers and funders. It's a conversation that challenges us to **stop playing by the same rules ... the ones that give us the same mediocre results every year ... and change the game entirely.**

## NEXT SLIDE PLEASE

In addition to the 11 million reduction in the 2020-2021 funding formula freeze, we've maintained service levels through multiple financial impacts.

Like the City of Edmonton and many other organizations, the pandemic has affected the service significantly ... and not just from a budgetary standpoint.

It's also come at the cost of the mental health and well-being of our civilian and sworn members, especially in the rise of domestic violence and violent crime. These trends carry reprehensible impacts to victims that are felt throughout the community and by all first responders.

From a financial standpoint, we lost over 100,000 operational hours due to the pandemic: the equivalent of 55 FTEs. In 2020 and 2021 year-to-date, that accounts for 7.5 million dollars.

We've navigated this this by delaying a recruit class, increasing scrutiny on civilian vacancies, offering buyout for eligible sworn member retirements and encouraging the use of vacation.

Councillors often ask us how our frontlines are doing ... and, quite frankly, they're tired. Not just of the pandemic, but of the relentless social media rhetoric that detracts for the realities in our city... the realities they see firsthand day-in and day-out.



Unfortunately, the pandemic impacts will continue well into 2022... but the EPS is equipped to handle them within the current means that the funding formula provides.

COVID-19 aside, one-time budget impacts include:

- Participating in the City of Edmonton's enterprise commons capital project (2.2 million dollars)
- Modernization of our records management system (700,000 dollars)
- In-car video ... a commitment made by EPS during public hearings in 2020 that will have on-going costs of 1.5 million dollars to maintain once implemented.

On-going annual costs come from:

- Provincial budget changes to Traffic Safety Act revenue and biological testing (roughly 5 million dollars)
- The announcement of Truth and Reconciliation Day. Though EPS wholeheartedly supports the day as part to encourage employees to reflect and learn, it generates an additional 1 million dollars in associated costs due to statutory pay for maintaining police services.
- Edmonton Public School Board's decision to terminate the School Resource Officer program has resulted in a loss of 1.3 million dollars.

Again, I'll repeat that we've been able to handle these budget pressures effectively **because of the funding formula.**

Collective bargaining agreements are pending ratification and remain one of the biggest risks to EPS' financial standing being that 82 per cent of EPS' budget is allocated to salary. The results of bargaining are out of EPS' control as council sets the mandate and ratifies the agreements, but ... if further reductions are made to EPS' budget ... the agreements may become unmanageable.

All this to say... **the EPS is not asking for more money.**  
**We are only asking for what's been allocated through the existing funding formula...**

**what was approved four years ago** and what we've leveraged to innovate and advance as change leaders in Canada's policing landscape.

This has been the basis for our work, and 2022 is a year set to see many returns on that investment – especially in the realm of community safety and well-being work.

However, at the end of the day the Edmonton Police Service can't stop responding to calls for service...we are duty-bound to continue providing service to Edmontonians as per our legislated mandate.

If we take any more losses, the next question is what gets delayed or stopped entirely? What will we have to set aside to maintain our core, legislated function?

We're done maneuvering; we've taken too many hits. Any more reductions and stress on our frontlines will increase well past where it already is.

Our plans to move 30 people back to the frontlines and increase visibility will be impacted. And, we may have to look to things like reducing traffic safety and becoming more reliant on photo radar enforcement to fill the gap.

Anywhere there are redundancies – places like transit where the city already has substantial resources invested – may be in jeopardy, too.

We have countless data driven and evidence-based projects on our table ... ones that allow us to get ahead of trends rather than trying to catch up. But we won't be

able to balance everything.

I don't say these things to alarm you, but these are tough questions and an even tougher reality.

At the end of the day, we're here for the same reason you are – and we believe that Edmonton can be the same safe and vibrant city you do.

**We're not asking for more money. We're only asking that you let us continue the work we've started.**

Thank you, and I can now take your questions.