

# Police chief outlines plans and priorities for 2007

By Bill Rea

There are going to be a number of legal and law enforcement challenges facing York Region this year, and the local police are planning to stay on top of them.

Chief Armand La Barge offered an overview of policing priorities in 2007 and beyond at the recent first meeting of the year of the Police Service Board.

Policing is no longer just a local matter, La Barge said, as global and national influences continue to play a role. He pointed to advances in technology, that have influenced the coming generation and given them a different thought process. As well, waves of immigration are still coming to north America, and that includes York.

The internationalization also involves possible health hazards, as people in this area learned a couple of years ago with the SARS outbreak. As well, La Barge pointed to a trend toward crime without borders. Technology like the Internet makes it possible to victimize someone on the other side of the world.

Other international events impacting locally include the war on terrorism. The fact that Canadian troops are on the ground in Afghanistan means places in Canada can be targets of terror, including in York. As well, there are growing problems with drugs, and he said human trafficking is likely to emerge as the "crime of the future."

Looking at the local situation, La Barge said the high levels of growth and immigration are expected to continue, leading to

increased social diversity and larger senior and youth populations. He also said there will be more high-density development in the southern part of the region and a widening in the income gap, while public expectations continue to grow.

In terms of evolving crime trends, La Barge said computers and the Internet are playing big roles, in such areas as child exploitation, luring and pornography. Crimes against seniors, such as various types of scams, is something police are watching out for, especially since the elderly population is growing. As well, La Barge said they are watching organized crime, including biker gangs and Hell's Angels. Their growth is fueled by the lucrative drug trade, he said. He added the byproducts of these drug crimes included killings, robberies, home invasions, etc. La Barge also said they are watching for other types of crime too, including those involving guns and gangs, robberies and carjackings, street-level crime and construction theft. He said there are cases of people entering houses under construction and helping themselves to items.

There's growing sophistication in the use of technology in crime, La Barge said, pointing to the increased cases of identity theft and ATM crime. He said it has a global reach, and has produced a new group of victims too. On the other hand, he said cameras and computers can be used in crime prevention too.

Despite perceptions, La Barge maintained the crime rate in York has been

declining. This is due partly to the aging population, although he cautioned that the growing population and increased urbanization are likely to push the numbers up. He added the pressure to keep crime down persists, since the fear is still out there.

Compared with other communities in southern Ontario, York had the lowest crime rate in 2005. It was accomplished with a police-to-population ratio of 1:775 (Toronto's is 1:516) and a per-capita policing cost of \$188 (Toronto's cost is \$301).

La Barge commented the fear of crime and victimization creates a number of problems. He said between 60 and 90 per cent of incidents are not reported, many involving mischief. That's unfortunate, since if police know about these incidents they have a better chance of getting to the bottom of them.

He also pointed out that youth are more likely to be victims of crime than seniors. He explained elderly people tend to stay away from situations where they could wind up in difficulties. He added most violent crimes are committed by people known to the victims.

People's expectations from police tend to increase with their quality of life. La Barge said that includes increased levels of service, more transparency and fiscal accountability, meaning wise use of tax dollars.

New and proposed legislation is also aiding in law enforcement. La Barge cited legislation addressing mortgage fraud, marijuana grow-ops, street racing,

proceeds of crime, setting up a DNA data bank, mandatory sentencing for certain offences like luring, etc.

La Barge addressed changing demographics in the region. The population is nearing the 1.3 million mark, with increased youth, immigrant and senior numbers, as well as more people in low-income categories and a wider variety of household types. Other projected trends include expanded diversity in the multi-ethnic population, continued employment growth, increased citizen participation and increased traffic issues.

There are several methods employed for seeking public input, including a community survey conducted in 2004, workshops, forums, presentations, councils, and liaison committees, and La Barge said safety and low crime constantly rate as things people are concerned about. He added the top five concerns are traffic safety, youth issues, police visibility, effective communication and violent crime.

La Barge said the priorities for 2007 will include traffic enforcement and education. That will not just mean handing out tickets, he said, although he said there were some 118,000 tickets issued in 2006, up about 5,000 from last year. Education will be an important component too, with stresses on responsible driving, use of safety belts, and not speeding or driving while impaired.

He added there will be a priority placed on drug

eradication and education, through waging war on grow-ops and education programs through the schools and at the community Safety Village in Stouffville. La Barge observed that eight children have been recently rescued from grow-ops by police. These are very dangerous situations for kids to be in, because of fire and electrical hazards, and the fact there is so much criminal activity at hand.

Another priority will be dealing with violent and organized crime.

Emergency preparedness is also going to be a priority, and that includes being ready for terrorist incidents or natural disasters.

La Barge also commented on the need for the police to reflect the community, and that includes vision when recruiting officers and increased training.

When it comes to measuring performance, La Barge agreed it's hard in some cases, which means public input will be more important. "A lot of that is going to come from the community consultation process," he said.



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## Police board returns chair and vice

By Bill Rea

There are no changes at the top of the York Regional Police Services board this year.

At their first meeting of 2007 last month, the board unanimously voted to return Richmond Hill Mayor David Barrow as chair and Regional Councillor Danny Wheeler of Georgina as vice-chair.

Regional Chair Bill Fisch put Barrow's name into nomination (Barrow was absent, but Fisch presented documents that he had consented to serving), stating he's been "very capable" in the five years he's headed the board. Board member Daisy Wai of Richmond Hill nominated Wheeler.

"We are proud of what our board and York Regional Police have achieved in 2006 and I look forward to another productive year in 2007," Wheeler commented as he spoke on behalf of himself and Barrow after the

election.

"It's important that we build on the momentum," he added, as he said crime prevention and law enforcement procedures will continue with enthusiasm and professionalism under Chief Armand La Barge.

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