

LATE DISTRIBUTION FOR COUNCIL - MARCH 24, 2009

A15



CITY OF VANCOUVER

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

Report Date: March 19, 2009
Contact: D. LePard
Contact No.: 604.717-3159
RTS No.: 8001
VanRIMS No.: 08-2000-20
Meeting Date: March 24, 2009

TO: City Council
FROM: City Manager and Chief Constable
SUBJECT: Vancouver Police Department "Project Rebellion"

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for Information.

CHIEF CONSTABLE'S COMMENTS

The Vancouver Police Department's (VPD) commitment "to be the safest major city in Canada" has recently been tested by the alarming increase in gang related activity both in the City and in the surrounding region. In the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan, the VPD promises to suppress violent gang activity; however, without the on-going support of all stakeholders, including municipalities, integrated investigative teams and the Provincial Government, this goal is in jeopardy. There has been success in reducing spontaneous shootings through the work of the uniformed Integrated Gang Task Force officers, the VPD Firearms Interdiction Teams, and the community partnerships with businesses under the Barwatch and Restaurant Watch programs. However, targeted gang shootings remain difficult to solve. The VPD will continue to fully investigate these shootings, but a complementary suppression strategy recently launched is a proactive approach which aims to put as many gang members and associates in jail as possible, and is supported by prevention initiatives in schools and the media. The VPD continues to provide a leadership role in the region in finding the most effective way of realizing the goal of reduced gang violence while working with provincial and regional stakeholders to ensure a co-ordinated effort results in success. It must also be noted, though, that because of the unprecedented level of gang violence and the ongoing need for VPD to respond accordingly, the VPD's Criminal Investigation Fund is projected to be significantly over-budget by year-end. Because of budget reductions elsewhere, the VPD has little chance of making up the difference with internal budget adjustments.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

We are going through an extremely difficult and challenging period for the City with the economic downturn and the loss of projected revenues. While we continue to take every possible action to identify savings and reduce the impact to tax-payers, we also recognize that at the same time the Vancouver Police Department must deal with an unprecedented level of gang violence. This has resulted in a situation whereby the VPD has used almost half of their Criminal Investigation Fund (CIF) in the first two months of this year. As this unprecedented level of expenditure will continue, it will take the VPD over budget in the CIF and jeopardize the ability of the Vancouver Police Department to remain within budget for 2009.

COUNCIL POLICY

There is no applicable Council Policy

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Information Report is to inform Council of a successful proactive strategy and complementary preventative initiatives by the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) to address gang violence in the City of Vancouver. In addition, this report advises Council of the significant budget impacts of the highly resource-intensive strategies undertaken, the pressure this has placed on the VPD budget, and the internal and external efforts being made to mitigate the budget impact.

BACKGROUND

Gang violence in Metro Vancouver is a significant problem, has resulted in numerous shootings and murders, and has caught innocent victims in its path. In recent years, the intensity and frequency of violent gang-related incidents has accelerated. For example, in the 12-month period beginning in October 2007, a series of 14 gang-related murders occurred in Vancouver (with additional gang-related murders elsewhere in the region). Numerous spontaneous shootings in public places also occurred. In response, in November 2007, the VPD led the creation of a regional "Violence Suppression Team", which the Province subsequently agreed to fund as the uniform arm of the Integrated Gang Task Force. Further, in early 2008, a series of discussions occurred in the VPD regarding the barriers to solving gang-related homicides.

These include:

- Gang members seldom cooperate as victims or witnesses
- Gang members successfully intimidate witnesses
- Gang members are skilful in planning and covering up crimes because they have been extensively educated through disclosure and criminal trials on police investigative techniques
- Gang members deal with opposing gang violence quickly through extreme retaliatory violence, often killing suspects before they are brought to justice
- Some investigative techniques are unavailable to investigators due to the extreme violence of these gangsters, which puts police officers' safety at risk
- When charges are laid, the conviction rate is relatively low due in part to the unreliability of criminal witnesses to these types of crimes

- Crown Counsel is overworked and understaffed and are severely challenged by the resource intensive nature of complex gang prosecutions .

These discussions led to an agreement to hold a "Regional Homicide CompStat" meeting, which was held on September 11, 2008 and co-chaired by Chief Constable Chu and RCMP Assistant Commissioner Peter German. (CompStat, short for Computer Statistics or Comparative Statistics, is a crime analysis and accountability model pioneered in the New York Police Department by Chief William Bratton in the early 1990s designed to facilitate accountability and effective resource deployment. Its main features are use of accurate and timely intelligence, rapid deployment, effective tactics, and relentless follow-up and assessment).

There was attendance from police leaders from the Metro Vancouver region, as well as the leaders of provincial or regional units such as the BC Integrated Gang Task Force (IGTF), the Combined Forces Special Enforcement Unit (CFSEU), Federal RCMP, and the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team (IHIT). Intelligence analysts were asked to identify which persons or groups were most likely to engage in shootings and murders. The three most violent groups were then divided up among IGTF/IHIT, CFSEU and the VPD for proactive investigations. The VPD's targets were investigated under the project name "Rebellion," and were believed to be responsible for up to 100 shooting incidents and other acts of violence, primarily in southeast Vancouver, in the past several years. Substantial resources were transferred or refocused from many areas of the VPD to proactively work on the identified targets. These resources included a team of 24 investigators, as well as intelligence analysts, support staff and significant numbers of staff for covert work.

DISCUSSION

Enforcement:

The objective of Project Rebellion was to proactively target the most violent gang members involved in conflict, intercede before shootings and murders occurred, and arrest and charge the gangsters for any identified offence that would result in a significant jail term thereby taking the most violent offenders out of circulation. Project Rebellion has successfully dismantled the crime groups that were targeted and achieved specific goals as follows.

First, in the one year period immediately prior to the initiation of Project Rebellion, there were 14 gang-related homicides. Since Rebellion began in October 2008, there have been only three gang-related homicides, none of which were related to the groups targeted by Rebellion. Further, in the five-month period from October 2007 to February 2008 inclusive, there were a total of 29 confirmed "shots fired" incidents in Vancouver, compared to the first five months of the Project, during which there were 16 confirmed shots fired incidents. While there has been a dramatic increase in Lower Mainland shooting incidents, at the time of writing Vancouver has experienced fewer compared to the period prior to Rebellion being launched.

Second, with respect to criminal charges, the following results were achieved from an intensive investigation which employed a variety of investigative techniques:

- Overall, one hundred and twenty charges are approved or potentially pending against up to thirty-eight individuals in relation to at least thirty-two incidents. These offences/charges include: one individual for two counts of murder in relation to one incident; twelve individuals for five robbery, home invasion and break and enter incidents; six individuals for ten offences including assault, causing a disturbance, kidnapping, and threatening; twenty-one individuals in relation to ten weapons possession/trafficking incidents; fifteen individuals for eleven drug possession/trafficking incidents; and one individual for one theft over \$5,000 incident.
- In addition, approximately 26 articles of firearms and firearms-related parts, ammunition and bullet-proof vests have been seized or otherwise acquired by police in relation to Rebellion. Several assault rifles have been seized from targets, and Rebellion is very close to securing other firearms and associated charges as of this date.
- Further, significant amounts of drugs, including crystal meth, heroin, crack cocaine, ecstasy, marihuana, and unknown narcotics have been seized or otherwise acquired by police in relation to Rebellion. As well, an undercover operation was largely successful, resulting in twenty-four successful buys from four drug lines. Rebellion will be executing further search warrants and will be pursuing seizures of gang assets in the near future.

Third, as a result of information received during Project Rebellion, at the request of IHIT, the VPD also took command of the investigation into the attempted murder of two individuals that occurred in February, 2009 in Surrey at the T-Barz Cabaret. The resulting Joint Force Operation with IHIT resulted in charges against the leader of the U.N. (United Nations) group, Barzan Tilli-Cholli, and several associates.

Finally, the Project Team was able to intercede and make arrests in multiple incidents where information was received that a murder was about to occur and in which gang members were in "hunting mode" (e.g., armed and wearing bullet-proof vests). These planned, brazen acts of violence would have created an extreme risk to the public.

Prevention:

The suppression of gang activity relies not only on enforcement, but also on the prevention of gang activity over the long term. One crucial area of prevention is one which seeks to protect vulnerable or high-risk youth from gang recruiters. To that end, the VPD has led or partnered in many programs that address this important area of prevention. The "Truth about Gangs" is a joint presentation developed by two VPD Youth Services Detectives and one School Liaison Officer. It has been presented at almost every high school in Vancouver as well as at-risk elementary schools. The presentation goes beyond traditional "scared straight" programs and is a frank and graphic account of gang life and violence in the Metro Vancouver area. It is set in a video format and has music and media that is appealing to young people as well as media footage of several high profile gang incidents.

The Vancouver School Board has developed a set of discussion questions for teachers to use after the presentation. The material is age appropriate depending on the group, and includes significant narration by the police members. The response from school staff has been incredibly supportive.

The gang presentation has been reviewed by both faculty at Simon Fraser University and by staff at the Vancouver School Board who are developing an anti-gang strategy for Vancouver schools. The presentation is in high demand from a number of Metro Vancouver schools, including schools outside of Vancouver.

The VPD continues to seek out and develop innovative methods of reaching the target youth. In addition to the existing internal "Truth about Gangs" program, the VPD has worked with the Ministry of Solicitor General and approached a professional marketing firm to help develop a campaign designed to protect youth who might see the gang life as a glamorous and viable career choice. Since youth are more concerned with appearing "cool" than they are of dying, this campaign is designed to deglamorize the gangsters and expose them as liars.

This hard hitting and innovative campaign uses the tag line "If gangs told the truth, no one would join." The focus of the campaign is the portrayal of gangsters as inept liars who have mounted a public recruitment effort to get kids to join them. It employs multi-media, radio and TV, and special tactics to reach youth. The campaign includes job applications that ask whether you mind being hit in the face with a baseball bat or spending long periods of time in jail. Ads boast of "plenty of openings - don't ask why." One proposed call to action asks youth to text a special number where they instantly receive an anti-gang message and an invitation to visit a special web site "don'tjoin.ca" where they can get more information and where youth already in gangs can receive exit strategies. The proposed campaign has been endorsed by the BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police and the Joint Management Team of the BC Integrated Gang Task Force.

ENFORCEMENT ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

It is important that the VPD, in collaboration with other agencies, continues to work aggressively to curb gang violence by intervening early and by gathering evidence of serious crimes so that gang members can be arrested, charged, and jailed. The VPD has examined various models for proceeding, with particular attention to accessing external funding, so that funding is available for the considerable resource levels required for success. Returning to a mainly reactive response to gang violence is not a viable option.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Undertaking a project such as Rebellion is extremely resource-intensive. In addition to creating a large investigative team by re-deploying investigators from other areas, the VPD's Strike Force surveillance teams worked at maximum capacity throughout the operation, as covert round-the-clock surveillance was an important and effective strategy in gathering evidence and reducing risk to the public. This project also required maximum staffing levels in the wiretap facilities, which are normally staffed only on an as-needed basis. This created an unbudgeted expense entirely borne by the VPD's Criminal Investigation Fund (CIF). Finally, VPD Emergency Response Teams were required on numerous occasions to effect high-risk arrests, at considerable cost when overtime had to be employed.

The overtime and covert investigation costs necessary for this operation are extraordinary, and the VPD is not funded to sustain such a large operation addressing a regional crime problem for a lengthy period of time. To exacerbate this situation, in the middle of Project Rebellion, the VPD investigated an unprecedented three kidnapping complaints within two

weeks. One of the kidnappings was unfounded; however, the second resulted in multiple extortion charges, and the third resulted in the dramatic rescue (after five days in captivity) of a young Chinese male in Canada on a student visa, and the arrest of four suspects for kidnapping and related charges. These and other serious investigations further drained the VPD's \$2,000,000 CIF such that by early March, it was approximately 50% spent, putting the VPD in a precarious financial situation for 2009. With CIF expenses expected to continue at the current level, the CIF is projected to be significantly over-budget by the end of 2009.

The VPD is working with senior City and Provincial officials to address the funding needed to continue the fight against gang violence. The BC IGTF has provided \$200,000 of assistance, and there is a request for financial assistance from the Provincial CFSEU.

PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

As described earlier, the resource demands of Project Rebellion were extreme, largely because of the overwhelming volume of intelligence that was developed through various covert proactive strategies and the resulting follow-up required. Many investigators worked multiple weeks of long shifts without days off because of the demands of the investigation. Burnout became a significant concern, particularly for surveillance resources, and the Chief Constable took the unprecedented step of communicating information about the impacts of these demands to investigators' families to thank and acknowledge them for the hardships created. Not only were the sworn and civilian staff directly involved in Rebellion affected, but so were staff in those areas that loaned staff who were left with fewer personnel to shoulder the workload.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The unprecedented level of recent gang violence - much of it occurring in public spaces - has generated considerable fear and concern in the public, as evidenced by the almost daily high-profile media coverage of gang-related shootings. Project Rebellion was a necessary response by the VPD to the lack of regional capacity to address gang violence. It was necessary to respond to the level of fear, restore perceptions of safety, and reduce the level of violence by arresting and charging the leaders and most violent gang members operating in Vancouver and other areas.

This enforcement response, coupled with continued and ongoing preventative initiatives, is the most effective way to attack the gang problem from both ends. The need for ordinary citizens to feel safe and secure in their homes, workplaces and public spaces, and the need for confidence in all levels of government and the criminal justice system to provide this level of safety, is fundamental to a liveable city and region. The level of gang violence in Metro Vancouver is unprecedented and requires an unprecedented response.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

All communications regarding Project Rebellion are developed by the VPD's Public Affairs Section and part of an overall investigative strategy to prevent and suppress gang violence.

CONCLUSION

The intensity of gang violence in Metro Vancouver is unprecedented in our history. Since October 2008, the VPD has demonstrated an aggressive proactive strategy is necessary to complement reactive investigations and prevention initiatives into gang violence, and it has resulted in numerous charges for serious offences against the gangsters believed most responsible for the violence. Significant efforts by Crown have resulted in several of the accused being denied bail. Convictions for these offences are intended and likely to result in significant jail sentences, thereby taking key gangsters out of circulation. These investigations are resource intensive, and the VPD has made a significant resource commitment - at the expense of other duties - to achieve success. In addition, the VPD has taken a lead role in developing a powerful multi-media anti-gang campaign that will be created by a marketing firm with a proven track record. In summary, the VPD is committed to working with its partners to significantly reduce the level of gang violence in Vancouver and the region.

* * * * *