December 8th, 2017

Vancouver City Council
453 West 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC   V5Y 1V4

Dear Mayor Robertson and City Councillors:
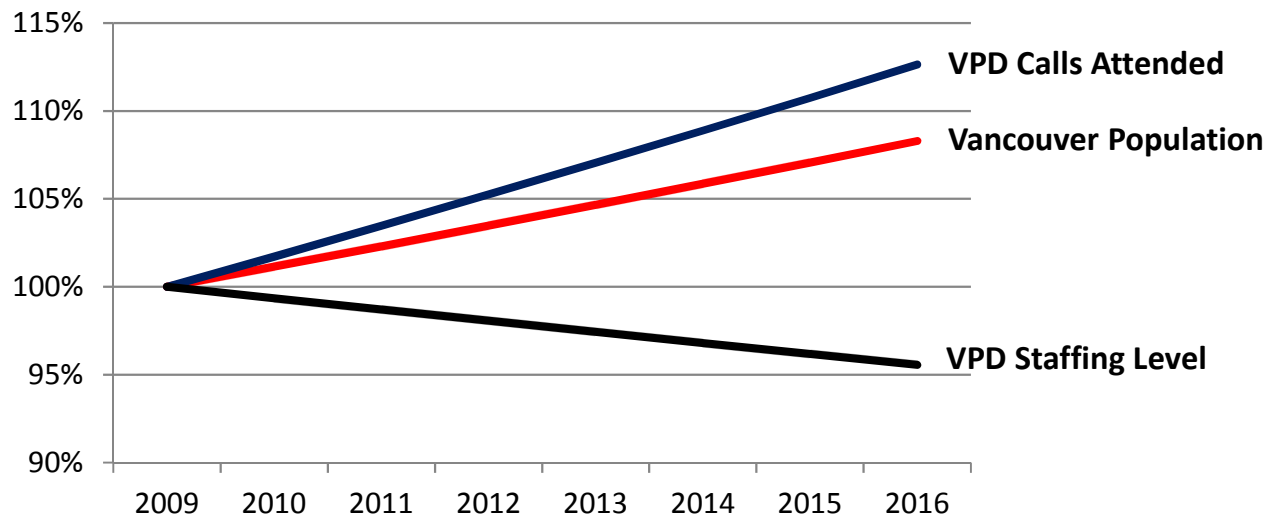
Re: Vancouver Police Department 2018 Budget

I thank you for your consideration of the Vancouver Police Department (VPD) 2018 Budget, which was discussed at the Special Council meeting held on December 6th, 2017. At the meeting, there was a request for additional information about the growth of calls handled by the VPD since 2009, when the last Operational Review was implemented, and the impact of the opioid crisis on VPD calls for service.

Since 2009, the number of calls for service handled by the VPD has increased by 12.6%. This increase has been largely driven by rising population, as Vancouver's residential population has grown by 8.3% over this period. As a result, VPD officers now attend 18,500 more calls annually than they did in 2009, which is an increase of over 50 calls per day.

The fastest growth in calls for service has been for high priority calls involving acts of serious violence or immediate threats to public safety that are in progress and require the most urgent police response, which are referred to as Priority 1 calls. There are over 4,000 more Priority 1 calls per year than in 2009, a 25% increase. As a result, there is an average of 11 more incidents everyday where VPD officers respond to emergency situations that involve immediate risks to the public safety such as persons with a firearm, sexual assaults in progress, robberies in progress and assaults in progress. Even when the emergency is addressed and safety is restored, Priority 1 calls require significant police resources to investigate; on average each Priority 1 call takes nearly five hours for officers to resolve.

In addition to being faced with a rising number of calls for service, the VPD now operates with effectively 5% fewer staff than in 2009, as 59 sworn and 29 civilian positions are currently unfunded. The rising demands for service, especially for high priority incidents, combined with fewer staff, has resulted in slower response times. In 2009, the VPD averaged an eight-minute response time to Priority 1 calls for service.

However, this figure has steadily increased and is currently nine minutes and forty-seven seconds, a 22% increase.

The emergence of the opioid crisis has placed additional strain on VPD resources. Calls for service associated with the opioid crisis include sudden deaths, overdoses, and calls to assist Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services and the BC Ambulance Service to ensure the safety of first responders. These call types have collectively increased by 47% since 2009. While the increase in these call types has been appreciable and is associated to the emergence of the opioid crisis, it is important to note that this increase represents only 1.4% of total VPD calls for service.

As such, the additional frontline officers and support staff identified in the VPD Operational Review are required to respond to rising overall demands and to ensure public safety moving forward – the opioid crisis being just one of the many demands that the VPD has to address to ensure public safety in Vancouver. Additional resources are required to respond to the rising number of priority calls for service and to ensure the physical as well as mental health of VPD staff going forward.

I am hopeful that the results of the comprehensive VPD Operational Review assists you in your discussions of the 2018 Capital and Operating Budget. I believe that this review, which was led by independent criminologists, identifies cost efficient and effective methods of maximizing public safety. These resources are essential to ensuring that the VPD can continue: fostering community partnerships, engaging youth, assisting people with mental health issues, supporting the marginalized, and combating upstream drivers of crime. Ultimately, this will ensure that Vancouver remains one of the best places in the world to visit, work, and live.

Sincerely,

Chief Adam Palmer