

## ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

<b>TO:</b> Robert Nicolay, City Manager	<b>DATE:</b> February 21, 2023
<b>FROM:</b> Lee Newton, Strategic Projects Manager  Chris Manuel, Executive Director	<b>MEETING:</b> Council Committee of the Whole
<b>SUBJECT:</b> Municipal Police Transition	

### RECOMMENDATIONS

That Council, pending confirmation of transition funding support:

1. Direct Administration to take all steps necessary to proceed toward an alternative police services provider through the establishment of a municipal police service in accordance with the attached Policing Transition Report; and that
2. Notice be provided to the Government of Canada of such by March 31, 2023, in accordance with the terms of the Municipal Police Service Agreement.

### PREVIOUS COUNCIL / COMMITTEE DIRECTIONS

1. City Budget 2021 funded a capital project to complete a Police Service Model Review.
2. At the September 28, 2022, special meeting of City Council, the following motion was passed:  
  
“Council authorize up to \$250,000 from Council's Strategic Initiatives Fund for the development of a detailed Transition and Community Engagement Plan to further assess the opportunity to establish a municipal police service for the City of Grande Prairie.”

### BACKGROUND

City Budget 2021 allocated funding for the completion of a Police Services Model Review (PSMR). The review was initiated for these primary reasons:

1. The Province is assessing a Provincial Police Service in replacement of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). If the Province proceeds, the RCMP will no longer be available to provide municipal contract policing in the city.

2. Recent Citizen Satisfaction Surveys identified that public perception on crime is negatively impacting citizens' sense of safety.
3. Policing expenditures are the City's most expensive annual operating expense consuming approximately 22% of the annual operating budget.
4. Good governance and management practices necessitate periodic in-depth assessment and evaluation of municipal services.

The PSMR concluded that regardless of the decision on a Provincial Police Service, the City of Grande Prairie could benefit from an alternative service provider by way of a municipal police service. Further analysis was recommended.

In October 2022, Council received the findings and recommendations of the PSMR and directed that third-party analysis by way of a detailed transition plan (inclusive of in-depth stakeholder engagement) be completed to truly assess the viability of a municipal police service for the City of Grande Prairie. MNP LLP was subsequently retained by the City to develop a Policing Transition Report (PTR).

In February 2023, the MNP led PTR was received by the City and will be publicly reviewed with Council on February 21, 2023.

## ANALYSIS

### **Police Service Model Review (PSMR)**

The PSMR found that, in general, the operational front-line policing services provided by RCMP members in Grande Prairie are considered acceptable. The police officers assigned to the community are viewed as hardworking and well-regarded.

Despite these efforts and substantial investment, the City of Grande Prairie continues to greatly exceed both provincial and national averages in relation to Crime Severity Indexes. The PSMR team identified there is sufficient reason to believe that the municipal policing arrangement with the RCMP may not be viable in the future. This is attributed to:

- Significant recruiting challenges associated with RCMP national recruiting efforts;
- Inability to retain senior constables in the community due to RCMP staffing and relocation policies;
- Challenges being sufficiently sensitive and responsive to Grande Prairie's specific local needs and circumstances;
- Bureaucratic policies and procurement systems associated with a large national government organization; and
- Ever-increasing costs with little municipal influence arising from federal control of RCMP.

The PSMR concluded that a Grande Prairie municipal police service could provide an alternative that would effectively address these challenges and improve the quality of police services in the community.

## **Policing Transition Report (PTR)**

The PTR details the process and considerations for transitioning from RCMP policing to a municipal police service in Grande Prairie. The transition report covers topics such as necessary oversight and governance, staffing levels and strategies during the transition, financial projections, and a high-level timeline for transition to a municipal police service.

### Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement was a critical component of the Policing Transition Report development. Engagement efforts included stakeholder interviews, focus groups, presentations, an online survey, and community open house events.

The following themes were reflected by many community members:

- Current police are viewed as a net positive
- Policing needs to meet the needs of equity deserving groups
- RCMP are sometimes perceived to be bureaucratic
- General desire for localized approach to policing
- Policing needs to better understand and incorporate the effect of social factors into their operations

The following misconceptions were also revealed regarding a standalone municipal police service:

- Belief that municipal police would be trained to a lower standard than the RCMP (in fact, training timelines and curricula are equivalent and in line with Provincial Policing Standards and best practices)
- Belief that municipal police would be less impartial to local politics (in fact, a municipal police service increases civilian oversight to ensure impartiality)
- That the RCMP is 100% federally funded and that a municipal service would cost prohibitively more (in fact, policing costs are the City's largest annual operating expense and evidence suggests similar or even possibly lower cost structures accessible through a municipal police service)

### Policing Transition

The PTR describes and assesses the conceptual municipal police service design and provides considerations related to the policing transition. The PTR confirms the following:

- The City understands and has a sound plan to meet the necessary regulatory and legal requirements related to a police transition;
- The conceptual police service design is capable of meeting both Provincial Policing Standards and best practices;

- The City has significant existing staffing and infrastructure to support a municipal police service. Robust plans exist to address any gaps;
- Grande Prairie would gain control over critical cost elements and could more readily direct costs with increased granularity than is available today; and
- Municipal policing costs are estimated to be similar to or less than what is expected under continued RCMP contract policing

### PTR Conclusion

The PTR concluded that a move towards a municipal police service aligns with the trend of police modernization. The PTR highlights several potential benefits and opportunities available to the City of Grande Prairie through a transition to a municipal police service model including increased local oversight and efficiency, increased community sensitivity and responsiveness, direct accountability to the community and taxpayers, improved officer retention based on stronger community ties, overall financial transparency, and viability. In addition, a municipal police service delivers community policing costs that are estimated to be similar to what is expected under continued RCMP contract policing.

### Relationship to City Council's Areas of Focus / Strategic Priorities

The Police Service Review aligns with Council's Strategic Priorities of Quality of Life, Innovative Efficiencies & Economic Readiness, and Engaging Relationships.

### Environmental Impact

No relevant environmental impact.

### Economic Impact

Policing is the City's most significant Departmental operating expense. A municipal police service will require substantial start-up/transition funding that is anticipated to be addressed through Provincial financial support.

Following a transition from the RCMP to a municipal police service, it is forecasted that annual policing expenditures would be similar to that of the existing RCMP contract policing, however operational expenses expenditures primarily related to corporate services would be spent within the community by way of local staffing as opposed to exported for positions based outside the region. This has a significant positive econometric impact on the Grande Prairie community.

### Social Impact

Crime can affect a community's residents, businesses, and growth opportunities. The best policing results occur when a community and the police are working together to achieve a greater level of community safety.

A municipal police service by design consists of employees primarily recruited from in or near the community. It should represent local demographics, understand local sensitivities or concerns, and have a strategy to address such in conjunction with community partners.

## **Relevant Statutes / Master Plans / City Documents**

Alberta Police Act  
RCMP Act  
Peace Officer Act  
Police Officers Collective Bargaining Act

## **Alternatives (Optional)**

1. Council could receive this report for information.
2. Council may direct Administration to take an alternative action.

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT**

Broad stakeholder engagement has occurred through this process. Stakeholder engagement efforts have included stakeholder interviews, focus groups, presentations, an online survey, and community open house events.

## **BUDGET / FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The funding requirements for the costs associated to the 5-year start-up/transition to a municipal police service are projected to be approximately \$19,000,000. These costs include transitional staffing, policing equipment, fleet assets, technology, infrastructure, recruitment, training, professional services, and contingency (20%). A funding request to assist with these expenses has been submitted to the Province, subject to Council deciding to proceed.

Following the transition, the annual operating budget of the municipal police service is projected to be similar or less than that of the projected RCMP contract budget.

## **SUMMARY / CONCLUSION**

Grande Prairie is a growing mid-sized city with a vibrant and diverse population. It acts as a regional hub serving over 280,000 people across Northwestern Alberta, Northern British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories. Over the next 25 years, the Government of Alberta projects Grande Prairie to have the largest population growth in the province.

While the city thrives across many metrics, crime and safety are frequently reported as top areas of concern for residents. Crime data confirms the public perception that crime is an issue in the city. The Crime Severity Index for Grande Prairie is significantly higher than both the provincial and national averages.

Grande Prairie has reached a size and complexity whereby it has outgrown its current municipal policing model (RCMP contract policing). Of Canada's 100 largest municipalities, the vast majority (79%) are policed by municipal or regional police services and this percentage is even higher for

large municipalities that act as the regional hub (85%). The PSMR and PTR recognize that a municipal police service would provide the following benefits to Grande Prairie:

- Increased local oversight, accountability, and efficiency offered through a local police commission and local decision-making autonomy;
- Police modernization free of historical encumbrances. The municipal police service is conceptually designed to provide a wide range of public safety services far exceeding that of historical law enforcement and is positioned to evolve with society more nimbly;
- Improved officer recruitment based on local candidate development and in-community police recruit training offered through a partnership with a leading police academy provider;
- Greater officer retention based on officers having stronger community ties;
- Overall financial transparency and viability. Grande Prairie would gain control over cost elements and could more readily direct costs with increased granularity than is available today;
- Community policing costs that are estimated to be similar to or possibly less than what is expected under continued RCMP contract policing; and
- Enhanced public safety infrastructure through the local development of:
  - An Integrated Public Safety Communication Centre (Dispatch) to serve all City first responders
  - A public safety Real Time Operations Centre with 24-hour staffing to provide on-going situational awareness of public safety in the city and surrounding area
  - New specialized policing capability in the form of a local Emergency Response Team (Tactical)

A move towards a municipal police service aligns with the trend of police modernization and will see significant enhancements to the region's public safety infrastructure. This alternative policing model will more easily adapt as the City grows and society evolves.

## ATTACHMENTS

Attachment #1 – Police Service Model Review

<https://engage.cityofgp.com/33181/widgets/135971/documents/90599>

Attachment #2 – Policing Transition Report

<https://engage.cityofgp.com/33181/widgets/135971/documents/98584>