

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON PUBLIC SAFETY

WHAT WE HEARD

December 3, 2024



Executive Summary

On Tuesday, December 3, 2024, the city of Mount Pearl welcomed attendees to a Community Conversation on Public Safety. This meeting, prompted by recent acts of violence in Mount Pearl, aimed to provide residents with an opportunity to express concerns, share ideas, and discuss collaborative solutions to improve safety in the community. Representatives from the RNC, city officials, and various community stakeholders participated in the dialogue.

Common Observations

- Participants spoke about the need for improved lighting in parks, trails, and around public buildings to deter crime and enhance visibility, particularly during winter months.
- Residents called for a more visible police presence, particularly in areas with higher reported incidents, to foster community trust and deter criminal activities.
- There were calls for increased support for parents dealing with troubled teens, as well as for additional resources in schools to help identify and assist children at risk of falling through the cracks.
- There was an emphasis on the need for accessible programs, trained counselors, and collaborative efforts between schools, families, and community organizations to ensure these children receive the guidance and support they need to thrive and to help children who are afraid of being bullied in school.
- Suggestions for community engagement and education included hosting workshops on personal safety, neighborhood watch programs and educating residents about existing city resources and emergency protocols.
- There was support for installing surveillance cameras in public areas and increasing signage to raise awareness about monitored zones.

Key Participants

- Mayor Dave Aker, Councillors Isabelle Fry and Jim Locke
- Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC): Chief Roche, Deputy Chief McNeil, and other officers
- Municipal Enforcement Division: Superintendent Blair Tilley and Constable Danielle Greavette
- Invited stakeholders: Provincial government departments, local schools, community organizations, and elected officials

Opening Remarks

Mayor Aker emphasized the importance of addressing community safety concerns and expressed gratitude for the swift response of the RNC to recent incidents. Councillor Fry highlighted the city's commitment to fostering a safe environment and introduced the RNC to provide context on the incidents and justice system processes. Councillor Locke outlined guidelines to ensure constructive feedback during the listening session.

Insights from the RNC and Municipal Enforcement

- The RNC detailed their response to recent incidents, noting increased patrols in school zones, trail systems, and neighborhoods. Seven arrests were made in connection with the attacks, which are now before the courts.
- Municipal Enforcement described their role in supporting safety through monitoring city camera systems, facilitating community programs like Neighborhood Watch, and collaborating with the RNC.
- Residents were encouraged to participate in the Neighborhood Watch Program, with Municipal Enforcement offering support to those interested in becoming block captains.

Key Themes from Resident Feedback

1. Perception of Declining Safety

Residents expressed concerns that Mount Pearl no longer feels as safe as it has in the past. There were mentions of increased vehicle break-ins, visible drug problems, and a general

sense of unease. Many called for proactive rather than reactive measures to address safety issues.

2. Youth and Community Support Systems

- Concerns were raised about the role of systemic issues, such as overburdened teachers and a lack of sufficient community resources, in contributing to youth violence.
- Some residents called for better support systems for children and families, noting that the justice system and schools often fail to address underlying problems effectively.

3. School Safety

Parents shared their worries about children's safety during commutes to and from school. Requests were made for increased patrols around schools during peak times.

4. Policing and Municipal Enforcement

- Several residents voiced frustrations about insufficient nighttime patrols and perceived limitations in the RNC's and Municipal Enforcement's capabilities.
- There were calls for greater resources and funding for law enforcement to ensure a visible presence in the community.

5. Personal Stories of Violence

Residents shared deeply personal experiences of violence and bullying, highlighting gaps in responses from schools and law enforcement. One individual described feeling unsupported by both institutions after her son was attacked, ultimately choosing to homeschool as a result.

6. Suggestions for Improvement

- Regular community meetings to foster dialogue and maintain focus on safety.
- Expanding resources for patrols and social programs.
- Investing in proven, evidence-based approaches to address community violence.
- Strengthening collaboration between the city, RNC, and provincial government to provide holistic support.

Conclusion

The meeting underscored the need for collaborative, proactive approaches to address safety concerns in Mount Pearl. Input from residents will inform a comprehensive report, to be released in the new year, outlining next steps and recommendations. The city extends gratitude to all participants for contributing to this vital conversation and remains committed to fostering a safer, more inclusive community.

Next Steps

1. Review feedback and incorporate into the city's public safety strategy.
2. Continue engaging residents through regular community safety meetings and updates.
3. Enhance collaboration with law enforcement, schools, and social services to implement long-term solutions.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON PUBLIC SAFETY NOTES

7:00pm, December 3, 2024
Reid Centre Gymnasium
126 Smallwood Drive, Mount Pearl

Please note: The following is not intended to be a verbatim record of the meeting, but the general commentary and action is noted.

Welcome and Introductions

Mayor Dave Aker

Mayor Dave Aker welcomed everyone and thanked all for attending this important community conversation on public safety and noted that the public event is being recorded which will be posted on our YouTube channel in the new year for those unable to attend.

A thank you was extended to Ken Parsons, NLAD Interpreting Services for interpreting this evening.

A thank you was extended to the RNC for attending, naming Chief Roche, Deputy Chief McNeil, Inspector White, Superintendent Sharon Warren and James Cadigan. Mayor Aker listed a number of community stakeholders who were invited to participate in tonight's conversation including:

Government of Newfoundland and Labrador:

- Public Safety & Correctional Services
- Services Delivery & Regional Operations
- Prevention & Early Intervention
- Department of Education

- Mount Pearl Citizen Crime Prevention
- Mount Pearl Paradise Chamber of Commerce
- Mount Pearl Intermediate
- St. Peter's Junior High
- O'Donel High School
- Mount Pearl Senior High

- Minister Seamus O'Regan
- MHAs Lucy Stoyles and Paul Lane
- Minister of Justice and Public Safety, Bernard Davis

- Minister of Education, Krista Howell
- Minister of Children, Seniors and Social Development, Paul Pike

Mayor Aker noted that the reason we are all here today is due to the recent acts of violence in our community and expressed concern and sadness that these events occurred in our community, and to the victims and families affected by such senseless acts. He alluded that these acts have to stop, and this public meeting is to provide an opportunity for the residents to ask questions and discuss how to make Mount Pearl a safe place for all.

Mayor Aker expressed gratitude on the swift action of the RNC on last week's attacks, their increased presence in our community as well as prioritizing the investigation.

Context Setting

Councillor Isabelle Fry, Co-Chair

Recreation and Community Safety Committee

Councillor Fry thanked Mayor Aker and all residents for attending this conversation this evening. She noted that this public safety conversation was prompted by the attacks which happened in our community a couple weeks ago and further noted that as the criminal investigation has been handled by the RNC with the cooperation of the city.

Councillor Fry welcomed the RNC to share a summary of the incidents and to perhaps explain the differences in the youth justice system process compared to the adult justice system process.

Response of RNC Chief Patrick Roche

He explained that these were random acts, and the matter is before the courts. The RNC Officers did respond quickly noting the involvement of Operation Control and the K9 Unit. Chief Roche noted that there were seven (7) arrests made and those are going to court. Chief Roche further noted that the youth justice is a different approach, different system of which he cannot and will not report on.

A resident stood within the audience questioning: Are any of those kids out? RNC Chief indicated he could not say if there were out yet.

NOTE: A few residents stood and walked to microphone in centre of room to question Chief Roche.

Councillor Jim Locke, Co-Chair, Recreation and Community Safety Committee, immediately noted to those in attendance that some things can be spoken and that we are all here creating a safe environment to express opinions, urged all in attendance to maintain decorum with one at a time to the microphone or raise hands for any questions to be entertained. He further noted that a ballot box is placed at the back of the room for those who would rather voice their opinions anonymously, and that

following this meeting there will be a de-brief and points will be brought forward for a report issued in the new year.

Councillor Isabelle Fry noted that we all share the concerns, and we are coming together to start the conversation. She provided a summary noting that these acts of violence do not reflect the values we, as a city, hold and that we, as a city, thrive on safety, mutual respect and community.

Councillor Fry thanked everyone for coming out once again to participate in this community conversation as every voice is a valued part of the solution. She then invited Blair Tilley, Superintendent and Danielle Greavette, Constable of Municipal Enforcement Division to share more about the role of Enforcement in our community and our Neighbourhood Watch Program.

Review of Municipal Enforcement

Blair Tilley, Superintendent

Municipal Enforcement

Superintendent Tilley thanked the RNC for their rapid response to the last weeks incidents and continued to explain the role of the city's Municipal Enforcement advising that they are a resource for all citizens and available to help with facilitating programs, such as the Neighborhood Watch Program. He continued to advise the following:

- ME Officers cannot arrest people doing a criminal act.
- ME Officers are familiar with the trail system.
- There is a review of 152 cameras throughout the city and the footage is given to the RNC when necessary.

Superintendent Tilley shared the concerns and shock within the community and requested that residents and community groups pool their resources and reach out to the ME Officers as they can help and provide guidance and assistance.

Overview of the Neighbourhood Watch

Danielle Greavette, Constable

Municipal Enforcement

Constable Greavette explained her role with the Neighbourhood Watch Program and its operation since 2014 providing assistance to many city streets. She noted that the Program works and that "you" as residents are better at noticing if anything is happening on your street, "you" know what belongs there.

She continued by empowering people to contact the ME Officers as they have the tools to respond to incidents and noted that if anyone would like to become a block captain of the program to reach out. The block captain is one who will communicate with the street residents.

Councillor Jim Locke thanked Blair and Danielle for the update. He noted that the Municipal Enforcement is also involved in various programs including the Seniors Independence Group and encouraged those in attendance tonight to visit the city's website to get all the information on the Neighborhood Watch Program.

Listening Session

Councillor Jim Locke Co-Chair

Recreation and Community Safety Committee

Councillor Jim Locke acknowledged that Mount Pearl is not known for these types of activities and provided a summary of ground rules for tonight's open feedback advising all to the following:

- Respect all voices: listen even if you disagree and avoid interrupting when someone is speaking.
- One speaker at a time: raise your hand or wait your turn to speak.
- A time limit of 2-3 minutes: allow others the opportunity to speak.
- No personal attacks: Address issues not individuals, be courteous and avoid foul language, insults and/or accusations.
- Avoid disruptive behaviours and silence all devices.
- Offer constructive feedback and suggestions in order to identify solutions;

All were encouraged to participate but not required as there are cards at the back for those not wanting to verbally provide feedback.

The floor was then open for residents to share their thoughts, concerns and/or suggestions by means of an open style facilitated microphone.

Commentary by Residents

NOTE: The names of residents were not documented in writing and the thoughts, concerns and suggestions captured are summarized, not verbatim, and in point form.

Feedback #1

- MP is not the same community I grew up in.
- Not as safe as it was.
- It seems to be re-active not pro-active.
- We are not making it safe ~ vehicles are broken into.
- Community not the same and unsure of why.
- Major violence and want families to feel safe.

Feedback #2

- Family grew up in Mount Pearl.
- We are not immune to all the broken systems.
- What types of 13–16-year-olds could do such a thing.
- Not always the parents' fault.
- Teachers are overworked.
- There are drug problems.
- The system is failing in Mount Pearl
- Its time for us to look after our children and grandchildren.

Feedback #3

- Need to be pro-active not re-active.
- Would normally walk but do not feel safe.
- Her son (11 years of age) school of MPI, he feels unsafe to walk to school.
- What can we do as a city to help children feel safe during the opening and closing of a school day.

Councillor Jim Locke opened the floor to RNC to respond. Deputy Chief Colin McNeil responded noting that the RNC has a strong relationship with the city and its ME Officers with constant communication to the city. There are patrols taking place of the schools, mobile bikes on the streets and on the trail systems. Schools have reached out to have RNC and ME patrol around the school zones and when the police car is seen, it is a quiet time usually. There is a DARE program within the school system. In the time span between the attacks and the meeting, police patrols stepped up in school zones with the Mounted Unit in school zones and on trails.

Feedback #4

- Vested interest in the community.
- As a resident, concerned with patrols not doing enough.
- Not patrolling during the night; Municipal Enforcement not out after 11pm.
- RNC lack of patrol here in Mount Pearl.
- Real time activity happening with only 1 person in car patrolling (hard to do and not working).
- These incidents have been happening over time.
- People are feeling scared and taking matters in their own hands.
- Appreciate the RNC; however, Province not giving funds to the city (community).
- Funds not allocated and need to step up.

Feedback #5

- Experiencing family violence for the past 5 years.
- Son went to school and had 6 people beat up on him; left him and threw away his phone.
- Those same 6 people went to the graduation.
- The 6 kids were identified to the RNC and took 6 months for RNC to investigate.

- The family was let down, reporters stopped talking to them.
- RNC didn't do their job.
- Felt no support.
- Schools noted as being sickening as they were made to feel like the bad ones.
- Noted a broken system.
- Wanting to sell their home as the kids are still threatening her son.
- O'Donel High Principal and Assistant Principal made their life hell.
- Continued to do studies at home.
- Need to share story and don't know where to go.
- She indicated Mayor Aker did not respond to her email; however, MHA Paul Lane did.

Councillor Jim Locke expressed concern of these circumstances and thanked her for being here; he then kindly asked that no individuals be named.

Feedback #6

- Resident of Ashford Drive.
- Social media not working.
- Requests that Council look at report & study summary she submitted which highlights proven methods of dealing with violence in the community.
- Justice process looks different for each.
- Supports are needed by the RNC, Social Workers, city, Etc.,
- People isolating in their homes.
- Encourage people to think of what they want to truly build the community.
- Have regular meetings like this to share stories.
- Don't want tax dollars spent on knee jerk reactions.

Feedback # 7

- There is a safety concern.
- Thanks all for coming, mostly seniors.
- How to rectify – by having more officers (government).
- Questioned if gang related.
- Random acts ~ how can we prevent an act such as this.
- Heard of the RNC policy ~ nighttime patrols not out as much as there is a gas allowance. questioned if this is still in effect.
- Need more resources.
- Need to be pro-active, if cannot continue to be re-active.

RNC Chief Roche commented and indicated that during his 40 years there has never been a gas allowance. He further indicated that there are 30 officers that will be in training next year; 405 officers on staff and they are actively recruiting to continue to answer the demands. It was noted that these random acts did take place and had to be re-active. It was further noted that there will be a conversation on how to be a part of the solution for kids to feel safe to walk to and from school.

Feedback #8

- Requested suggestions for kids walking to school.
- Know of teachers that pick-up kids along their route.
- Questioned if RNC, Teachers and School Board could get together and suggest other ways to alleviate kids' nervousness walking to school.
- Wouldn't want to go through the school system right now as bullying is much worse.
- Thanks to RNC, we all need to pool resources (sit down together).
- Community volunteers ~ pull them from the community as people are scared to walk in the evening and during the day.

Feedback #9

- Important meeting as engaging and listening is important.
- Asked if there are any options of places for kids to go.
- Noted that students are being asked questions.
- Police need to listen to the students' beliefs.

Feedback #10

- Indicated her husband was the gentleman attacked on Roosevelt Ave.
- Noted time of attack being 5:39pm when she received call from husband to get kids.
- Kids have not been back to Girl Guides.
- Impacts felt by her family.
- Noted increased violence and widespread.
- No-one person or group to blame but *all* are to blame.
- RNC response time was 20 minutes.
- Mount Pearl is no longer a city within a park.
- There is a concern for community safety.
- Suggested safety standards be in place by means of cameras throughout the schools, lots, streets, etc.
- If underfunded, it does not help anyone.
- A plea was made to all public officials that an action plan is needed to fix the violent crimes in this community.

All audience stood and applauded the sharing of her story, the feedback and suggestions.

Councillor Jim Locke expressed apologies and noted that agencies would work together as there is fear and concern; further expressed that we all cannot do this alone there is a requirement to work collaboratively.

Feedback #11

- Expressed thanks to everyone.
- Neighborhood Watch only can deter so many.
- Youth criminal justice – youth not held accountable.
- If they have the sense to carry out the crime, there should be actions.
- Noted 1 out of 5 would re-offend.
- Hold them accountable; the system is failing the citizens, city and community ~ those kids should be tried as adults.
- Eliminate the crimes by getting them off the streets.

Feedback # 12

- A resident of Mount Pearl for 17 years.
- Sons were in high school system.
- Would have loved to see Bernard Davis (Minister of Justice and Public Safety) in attendance tonight.
- Public safety must be a standard agenda item in all meetings.
- Elections coming up, all should speak on public safety and lead the way in public safety.
- Offered his services to assist with the city framework (benchmarks) for public safety.
- He noted he has seen many students carrying weapons to school as they are afraid to walk the city; this is happening (weapons were confiscated once in school).

Feedback #13

- Have teenagers currently in school system.
- Kids are scared, violence need to stop, stop the cycle.
- Kids need to be a part of the solution.

Feedback #14

- There is need to connect with community (youth).
- Justice system isn't working.
- Whitbourne doesn't have enough capacity.
- Youth likely to re-offend.
- Vulnerable with people who have the training (resources).
- Spend the money better to create a solution.
- Policy is great on paper but only a paper pushing exercise.
- Need communities & neighbourhoods again.
- Youth to be believed in.
- Connection is key.

Feedback # 15

- Indicated spouse is afraid to stay in house alone.
- A resident for over 55 years.
- Noises around his home during early mornings 2-3am.

- Noted that during his younger years, there were curfews, if not home by 9pm father was angry.
- Congratulates RNC on Rogers Show that shows the work they do.

Feedback #16

- Long time resident.
- Thinking the acts are a trend and will get worse ~ time for things to change.
- Government is missing the point on the needs of the people.
- Government not listening only voting red or blue.
- Kids that are left alone in groups will misbehave.
- Parents need more active role in their kids lives.
- Parents working full-time jobs, less time for their children.
- Programs tend to be too expensive for families.
- People just cannot afford to participate due to inflation.
- People in the province need to act.
- Maybe Confederation Hill to act.

Feedback #17

- Mount Pearl resident.
- Member of the Crime Prevention Committee.
- Commented on wonderful information being shared here tonight.
- Noted we are living in a different society.
- There is need to reach more people, young people for involvement in the Crime Prevention Committee.
- Crime prevention is everyone's responsibility.
- Citizens need to be pro-active as well.
- Encouraged those in attendance to join the Neighbourhood Watch Program.
- Crime prevention partners with the schools.
- All should come forward with strategies.

Feedback # 18

- A resident for 17 years.
- Understands the need for crime prevention heard but thinks its an unrealistic term.
- Crime going up ~ trend is increasing.
- More resources, economic and politics to follow.
- Finances should be discussed and consider the resources.
- Don't want his child to be fearful for school in the future.
- Noted to look "long term".

Feedback # 19

- Crime is escalating and needs to be addressed in the city and province.
- Kids around municipal properties, Summit and Glacier, causing concern.
- Referred troubled kids to staff who take no responsibility.

- Response time not fast enough.
- Teenagers were coming around their home, they installed cameras.
- Schools wont help.
- Kids keep coming back.

Feedback #20

- A resident for 4 years.
- Young offenders injured person in front of their home.
- There are many community programs, such as scouts, big brother/big sister, etc., that need funding.
- Province should investigate funding more of these programs.

Feedback #21

- Mount Pearl volunteer since 1992.
- Suggested to direct resources towards school systems as there are many issues.

Feedback #22

- A resident for 8 years.
- Feeling unsafe as there are assaults regularly in walking areas.
- There are people being assaulted, feeling sad for the community.
- There are many with mental health issues and maybe not being heard causing teen violence.
- Thank you to the city for organizing and look forward to what is going to happen.

Feedback #23

- Noted that since being here in Mount Pearl, felt welcoming.
- However, walked trail and encountered a young fellow carrying a knife.
- Noted there is one thing missing ~ no consequences anymore and kids know this.
- There has to be justice in the courts.
- When dark, afraid to walk home.
- There should be consequences for actions.
- Do see RNC patrolling.
- Refused to sit home and be afraid.

Councillor Jim Locke thanked everyone for their comments and for respectfully listening. He noted there were great suggestions made and that there is no “one magic solution”. Thank you was extended to all those who used the microphone and for the cooperation of everyone.

Closing Comments by City
Councillor Isabelle Fry, Co-Chair
Recreation and Community Safety Committee

Councillor Isabelle Fry expressed thanks to all for attending and voicing concerns, suggestions and providing feedback and noted that we, as a city, will find a way to help. She noted that its difficult to fully understand the challenges kids face when going to school and that not all youth are cause for concern that we have some tremendous young people within our community.

Councillor Fry advised that the city would provide a summary of the session in the new year and noted that we will make it better ~ don't know how, but we will.

Councillor Fry continued by stating that safety if our city is a shared responsibility and asked all residents to remain vigilant as this is a start.

Thank you was extended once again to the RNC, MHAs, and the people listening. Councillor Isabelle Fry stated that "we are listening".

Adjournment

The session adjourned at 8:44pm.

Written notes recorded by:

Sharon Ralph, Executive Assistant

Recreation and Community Safety Department

City of Mount Pearl

WRITTEN FEEDBACK

The city provided participants the opportunity to provide feedback anonymously at the meeting. Here is what they had to say.

- Bring back public shaming; put up pictures of offenders everywhere so we can all know who to watch out for.
- Educate young people on the importance of acceptance.
- Punishment should equal the crime.
- More policing in schools and recreation areas.
- Engage the public more.
- More consequences for actions.
- We all need to work together.
- Remember, most children and youth are great and law-abiding.
- All behavior is governed by two things: rewards and consequences.
- More CCTV in public areas in Mount Pearl.
- Encourage and fund more Citizen/Neighborhood Watch programs.
- Enforce a curfew for youth; limit how many can group together in public.
- This isn't the Mount Pearl I grew up in; I no longer feel safe walking on the trails.
- More punishment is needed for offenders. Kids are scared to be in school with violent youth.
- Have security checks in schools. There are rumors of students bringing weapons to school to "protect themselves."
- We need to find the root of the issue; be more proactive than reactive.
- Interact with the youth and younger audiences.
- While these acts are being called 'random,' there is a root to the issue. Is it race? Gender? Financial issues? We need to understand why before we share what.
- What is the city doing to help victims?

- Kids need to be taught to fear adults.
- The tunnels need CCTV and more security.
- This is clearly a racism issue as both victims were people of color. Why has nothing been said or done about this? I, as a POC, have been attacked three times within Mount Pearl (2009, 2011, and 2020). Why is nothing being said about this huge issue of racism within the city? When will the council stop only catering to seniors?
- There need to be more supportive services for youth and more staff for each program.
- We need to create programs that allow growth, communication, and a safe place.
- This is a symptom of our changing world; look at the politics, hate, and greed going on in our own backyard.
- Teach children to speak their feelings rather than act on their feelings and create safe spaces to do so.