

Police Services

A Bankrupt Future?

Given the proportion of Winnipeg's municipal budget consumed by public police costs, and given the rate of police budget growth, it is not a stretch to claim that the Winnipeg Police Service (WPS) budget will put serious strain on the City of Winnipeg in the 21st century. In fact, it already is. Topping \$288M in 2017, it constitutes the largest departmental expenditure in the operating budget, at 27 per cent. The WPS budget is a municipal emergency that must be addressed with urgency and structural changes.

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Will Community Policing Save Us?

Most approaches to alternative budgets advocate moving money out of regular duty policing and into community policing, which would ostensibly decrease direct costs of policing as well as indirectly decrease police costs by fostering social development and decreasing crime. We reject these claims. The tendency is that community policing extends police operations, surveillance, and criminalization.¹ Evidence from decades of community policing experiments across North America reveal that community policing is often a mere public relations project focused on reducing negative perceptions of the police rather than changing the operations that fuel those negative perceptions. Similarly, police service responses to calls for greater public accountability often focus on bolstering police resources. In its 2016 strategic plan, the WPS requested more funding for "innovative technologies" including body-worn cameras and a data

warehouse. There is little evidence to show that this technology helps keep citizens safer. The 2016 WPS strategic report acknowledges that "despite a steady drop in reported crime rates, more and increasingly complex tasks and responsibilities for police services have been driving their costs upward".² These "more complex tasks" do not result in more public safety.

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We must ask whether people's health and safety might be better achieved by re-directing that money. This will involve resisting police efforts to put themselves at the center of community development and safety efforts. As Gilmore and Gilmore³ have observed, police involvement is likely to weaken social development infrastructure. They claim that community policing indicates "no movement whatsoever to shift power away from the police. Quite the opposite: the provision of necessary goods and services through the police ...will further weaken what remains of the social welfare state and the neighbourhoods that most depend on public services". If public police are truly invested in "crime prevention through social development," they should recognize that community and social development is best achieved by organizations other than themselves.

Instead of community policing, we are proposing a decrease in the police budget to free up resources for other public investments.

Runaway Police Expenditures and Cost Overruns

We have studied cost and expenditure indicators of the WPS budget, in part using freedom of information disclosures. The WPS budget is marred by a number of problems. Between 2010

and 2015, total expenditures on policing increased from \$191.5 million to \$261 million — a 36 per cent increase in five years. These runaway expenditures and the culture of overrun at WPS would not be acceptable in any other department at any level of government. We are arguing that existing funding and future increases earmarked for community health and safety should not go to the police. To demonstrate what redirection of public funding away from police could look like, we have identified many lines in the WPS budget where funding could be scaled back.

Approximately 85 per cent of police costs are salaries and benefits.⁴ Wage settlements for police members after collective bargaining have been over 3 per cent in previous years; this does not happen for other workers in Winnipeg or Manitoba. Wage increases set out in the most recent collective agreement were smaller at 2.5 per cent a year from 2017–2020, but still higher than Winnipeg's current 1.8 per cent rate of inflation and much higher than bargaining results for other public sector employees.⁵ Between 2010–2015, total spending on WPS salaries and benefits increased by 38 per cent, a real increase of \$62,490,661.

A compounding factor regarding the WPS's biggest expense is that 23.9 per cent of its officers are eligible to retire,⁶ the second highest figure for any police service in Canada. These officers are at the top of the pay scale, amplifying salary and benefit costs and driving up the police and municipal budget.

Wage increases for police officers are a large public expenditure on a form of labour that, unlike other public sector work, does not have a long-term positive impact on public good.⁷ While the goal of police restructuring should be to reduce the total number of officers, we propose that in the meantime police members' salary and benefit collective bargaining outcomes should be indexed to the average of other collective bargaining outcomes in the city and province to correct for the massive increases police

members have received. Moreover, the positions that make up the 23.9 per cent of retirement eligible officers should be left vacant when those retirements occur.

Curbing salary and benefit increases for public police is a major, necessary change that should be made to control the police budget. A number of smaller changes would also make a big difference if those monies were diverted to actual social programs and community development.

Since 2010, money spent on acting pay has continued to increase. In 2015, the WPS spent \$718,730 on acting pay, which represents a 12 per cent (or \$77,562) increase since 2010. WPS employees continue to receive increased shift premium pay for evening and night shifts. The shift premium pay rate increased from 90 cents/hour in 2009 to \$1.00/hour in 2016,⁸ which cost \$975,373 in 2015. Overtime pay cost the WPS almost \$9.5 million in 2015 (\$9,446,651). Compare this expenditure with the cost of running the West End 24 hour safe space for youth in the Spence neighbourhood. With a mere \$380,000 of public funding over three years, WE24 has offered a space for over 550 youth a year to sleep and eat at night on the weekends.⁹ They have not been able to secure enough funding to offer this service seven days a week. This is one example of how redirecting overtime costs and acting and special pay could result in public benefit.

As the police service grows, costs associated with equipping each new officer also balloon. Over the past five years, WPS has spent between \$1.5M–\$2M a year on fleet fuels and chemicals alone. Fleet capital lease costs have risen, reaching a high of \$1.95M in 2015. Associated costs including parking space rentals and vehicle maintenance added up to \$1.1M in 2015. The yearly cost of telephones, cellular phones, computer software and hardware, and data has continued to grow, reaching almost \$2M total in 2015 (\$1.86M). We call for a reduction in vehicle, fuel and vehicle main-

tenance, computing, radio and computer, and cell phone operating costs.

Training, workshop, and tuition costs have also been increasing since 2010, reaching \$582,155 in 2015. These costs are often associated with what police claim is increasingly ‘complex’ work—new police roles such as community liaison positions, or equipping officers with new tools. We call for the police to demonstrate the public benefit of these expenses, and to cap training costs. We also call for the department to re-direct training costs to educating officers about cultural awareness, de-escalation techniques, unintentional bias and the social conditions that contribute to people becoming involved in the criminal justice system. More specific recommendations are offered below.

The costs for the WPS tactical support team (TST) are high. The costs for SWAT team use exceeded \$5,400,000 in 2016 and have trended up since 2010. This is because TST is being used for more routine policing activities.¹⁰ There must be a higher threshold for SWAT team use. We call for a moratorium on TST use for routine police activity so that it is deployed as infrequently as possible. We also call for a moratorium on TST equipment purchases. Some have called for the police helicopter and tactical vehicle to be sold. However, the most significant and ongoing expense is the TST itself.

Crime analysis is another overlooked, but escalating cost. The costs for crime analysis exceeded \$1,100,000 in 2016 and have trended up since 2010. We call for the WPS to cap current staffing levels for crime analysts, and assess the extent to which they are producing superfluous analyses.

Tens of thousands of dollars are also wasted on the old police headquarters (151 Princess Street) each year it sits vacant. The property should be repurposed to create a facility providing employment services, computer and language training, community research and development, and social and health programs for Manitobans. Al-

though the criminal investigation will suggest remedies to deal with overspending on the new police headquarters, we call for the WPS to find a way to repay the HQ cost overrun.

Budgeting Through an Equity Lens

The most significant statistical predictor of number of police officers per capita in Canadian cities is the size of a city’s minority population.¹¹ More racialized people in a city means there will be more police, but this does not translate into improvements in public safety for those communities.¹² Putting the safety concerns of Indigenous people, refugees, and women at the center of an analysis, there is evidence to suggest that investments in policing can increase the vulnerability of marginalized people,¹³ and that safety is better achieved through investments outside the criminal justice system. Increases in policing have been disproportionately targeted in Winnipeg’s Black and Indigenous communities under the guise of outreach to those communities.¹⁴ Through an equity lens, shrinking the police budget is about making more equitable investments in public safety.

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Recommendations from the 2018 ‘Winnipeg without Poverty’¹⁵ report would go a long way to increasing equity. Examples include:

- Replacing the Police Board with a Community Safety Board that has a voting membership including women and members of the LBGT2SQ+ and Indigenous and New Comer communities;
- A program to work with community-based organizations to strengthen cultural awareness, de-escalation techniques and to

educate officers on the social conditions that force people into the criminal justice system;

- Training officers to use their discretionary powers to help individuals into appropriate community programs rather than into custody, and to not fine low-income people for behaviour that does not threaten the public.

Police-centered responses have failed to address the safety concerns facing women, particularly poor and Indigenous women in Winnipeg. Community organizing around the inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women has emphasized the tendency of police to understand missing women in terms of criminal culpability, rather than structural vulnerability.¹⁶ Poor women are made most unsafe by a lack of affordable housing and inadequate EIA rates that endanger their abilities to dictate the terms of their own survival. Women and trans people who are engaged in sex work are especially vulnerable to violence because their work is criminalized, leaving them little recourse for harms they face while working.¹⁷ The above recommendations could address these problems.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) notes that offending history and arrest history accumulate and negatively impact Indigenous people.¹⁸ This is one way that systemic racism manifests in the criminal justice system. Policing is a key component of this problem. As the TRC states: “it is assumed that locking up offenders makes communities safer, but there is no evidence to demonstrate that this is indeed the case”.¹⁹ Applying an equity lens to the police budget should lead us to redirect existing police spending toward life-affirming public services like housing and training and employment. Long-term safety and security for all is better achieved by decreasing rather than increasing police funding.

Looking Forward

Austerity budgets for education, health, recreation, and welfare are harmful to working class people. Sharp cuts to budgets and services in Winnipeg and Manitoba should be viewed as even more outrageous in the context of increased police funding. Instead of responding to emergencies, the police are causing a structural one with their spending. More policing also leads to increased costs down the road, as the remand population continues to grow with those being held for minor breaches of condition — a direct result of increased policing.²⁰ To this end, we have flagged millions in the police budget that can be scaled back. Our estimates could even be considered conservative given the increasing costs of policing due to urban sprawl.²¹

We have called for the WPS to reduce overrun culture. We conclude with two broader recommendations that cut across the police budget. First, we call for the current organization of police governance (the police board) to be altered. The current budgeting process is not transparent, the police board simply providing a rubber stamp for what police want to do. There should be more public participation in the process.

Second, we are calling for a reduction of 2 per cent in the WPS budget. This would free up much needed funds for social spending. Without such drastic action, a bigger set of fiscal and social problems will overwhelm our city. There are two options: a financially strained and over-policed Winnipeg, or well-funded community, health, and housing sectors benefiting from a scaled-back and minimized Winnipeg Police Service.

We recommend cutting this year’s budget by 2 per cent.

Total New Revenue: \$5.76M

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