

Time for change now: police service

Solving problems instead of just dealing with symptoms, forging meaningful partnerships with community organizations, and recruiting and retaining a new generation of police officers are among the challenges and opportunities facing Durham Regional Police Services.

“It’s going to take our organization seven to 10 years to transition, but I think it’s absolutely the right thing,” Police Chief Mike Ewles told a group of business people attending Greater Oshawa Chamber of Commerce luncheon at Fazio’s restaurant on March 19.

The time for change is now, he said. “Policing is very, very expensive proposition ... We can’t keep simply throwing cops at problems ... We have to build on the strength of our community to transition our organization. The traditional approach for policing is primarily reactive,” he said, pointing to officers dispatched to hundreds of thousands of calls a year.

“They are literally running from call to call to call and it’s not effective ... If all we ever do is deal with the symptom, then we are part of the problem because we’re not doing our job as police officers. Our job as police officers is to solve problems, not deal with symptoms.”

The police service successfully measures things like crime rates but must learn how to measure outcomes. “Safer communities involve crime prevention ... getting to the root cause of those problems when they occur the first time,” Ewles said.

Community safety isn’t just about crime prevention, it’s also about dealing with people’s fear of crime, he believes. A fear of crime in downtown Oshawa exists, for example, but isn’t supported by data. “Downtown Oshawa is a very, very safe area compared to some other areas of the region,” Ewles assured.

The police service is hiring 70 to 100 new officers a year due to retirement and attrition, making this the right time for change. “Our new employee group is going to demand it of us,” said Ewles. The so-called ‘Net Generation’ watched their parents work hard, only to be downsized, and is skeptical of employers. “They are absolutely committed to finding work-life balance ... They want to solve problems in their community.”

Recruiting the right people and meeting their needs will help the police service retain officers. It must position itself as a “preferred employer,” while working to be more representative of the community. Once it develops its talent, it must reach out to the community and develop partnerships to solve problems.

“Is there someone in a better position than us to serve this citizen, this customer?” asked Ewles, listing the Eastview Boys and Girls Club and John Howard Society as valuable partners. “We have to go to those people who have the ability and subject matter expertise and we’re going to work with them as partners.”

Doing so will help relieve an overburdened court system, Ewles believes. He also addressed the consolidated courthouse currently under construction in

downtown Oshawa. It's "long overdue from a police perspective," and creates opportunities to find efficiencies.