

City councillor calls for Strathcona policing centre

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Strathcona needs a community policing centre to help reduce escalating crime in the neighbourhood, says Vision Vancouver Coun. George Chow.

Chow successfully introduced a motion to city council Jan. 19 to have senior city staff study the feasibility of opening a policing centre in Strathcona. "It would be a long term solution to managing public safety issues in the community without constantly having to add police," said Chow, who introduced the motion at the request of the Strathcona Business Improvement Association.



CREDIT: Dan Toulgoet

Coun. George Chow says Strathcona needs a community policing centre to reduce crime in the area.

In July 2009, Claude Lemay of the improvement association told the Vancouver Police Board that businesses had moved from the neighbourhood because of drug dealing and public disorder.

He said business owners want more drug arrests, more drug seizures and more police on foot, bicycle and horseback in the community. Strathcona has about 800 businesses.

The Vancouver Police Department's statistics on its website don't indicate the number of drug arrests.

But statistics for 2009 in Strathcona show there were 753 assaults, 168 robberies, 194 incidents involving "offensive weapons," 227 burglaries and 879 cases of theft of goods worth more than \$5,000.

Police Chief Jim Chu and Mayor Gregor Robertson announced Jan. 20 the crime rate was dropping in the city.

When looking at the overall average across the city, burglaries were down by 19 per cent and robberies by 13 per cent in 2009.

Auto thefts decreased by 17 per cent, thefts by four per cent and assaults by almost two per cent.

Chu acknowledged Strathcona was a "challenging neighbourhood" because of its proximity to crime problems in the Downtown Eastside. "It's not an easy problem to solve," the chief said. "So we'll continue to work on that."

Chu pointed out community policing centres operated on Keefer Street in

Chinatown, at Hastings-North and at Commercial Drive and East Hastings.

"We'll look at the proposal and we'll see if there's a need to increase [the number of policing centres]," added Chu, who has met with Strathcona business people and residents since he became chief in August 2007. "And if there's a way to leverage more volunteers for that neighbourhood, then that is a positive thing."

Chow said a policing centre would cost \$100,000 a year to run.

Roughly one-third of the Strathcona Business Improvement Association's operating budget, about \$178,000, pays for Genesis Security patrols.

Every two years, the business association conducts a survey with its members. Security is always the number one priority identified, according to the association.

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