To: Toronto Police Service Board Townhall

From: Susan Gapka, Toronto, Ontario

Wednesday, July 15, 2020, 1:30pm

Background:

My name is Susan Gapka (she/her) and thank you for listening to me today.

I grew up living on the military base at Trenton Ontario, home of Air Transport Command after living on air base in Metz France.

Grandfather – Boar War, WW1 veteran

Father was a Prisoner of War with Royal Canadian Air Force – WW2, Korean War where he was tortured and left mentally and physically injured and hospitalised throughout my childhood causing enormous hardship, distress and conflict within the family unit.

As a teenager, I rebelled and fled to Toronto, eventually becoming homeless on the streets. During that time I struggled with issues of mental health and addictions. Ongoing negative interactions with the authorities including the police offer me a complicated relationship with authorities, and over the years has caused much pain and grief.

Today I speak as an individual, and a member of the trans community, part of the lgbtq community, living near the village across from Ryerson University. I am proud to tell you that I am in long-term recovery for mental health and addictions for over twenty years.

Our community has a complicated relationship with authority and the police service. Some members are concerned about their public safety in growing racial, and economic inequality in the downtown east neighbourhood. Others are deeply embedded in the Defund the Police protestations and call these townhall meetings a sham. Myself, I prefer a balance in public policy implementation and strong governance mechanisms.

Two Key Recommendations:

1. Delay implementation of Body Worn Cameras until at least January 2022.

Rational:

1. Budget considerations during a pandemic response. Toronto cannot afford the $5 Million annual expense over a 10 year period at $50 Million.
2. If managed appropriately, and adhere to the abundance of recommendations, mental health professionals should become the first responders and not the police subsequently rendering body cameras unnecessary.
3. More surveillance technology sold by international corporations are not the appropriate response to this crisis in policing and the wrong default position. This is why people are angry.
4. City of Toronto create a Mental Health Response Unit, perhaps within Toronto Public Health.
5. City Council approved implementation of a Mobile Crisis Assistance Intervention Service and a review of CAHOOTS model from Eugene Oregon:

“ 18. City Council request the City Manager to report on the implementation of a City of Toronto Mobile Crisis Assistance Intervention Service that would deploy unarmed, medically trained crisis intervention assistance personnel, based on the "CAHOOTS" model from Eugene, Oregon; such report should include:

a. description of how these specially trained first responders would deal with a range of community challenges including: homelessness, intoxication, substance abuse, mental illness, dispute resolution, and basic medical emergency care; and

1. a process whereby when Crisis Assistance Intervention Service is established, that the City would subtract the cost of this new service from future Police budgets.”
2. A model is already in place from the Mayor’s Task Force on TCHC which both shifted Seniors Housing to the City and provided for non-profit, public agencies to manage some of the vulnerable portfolio.

In conclusion, I am seized by this matter. I have listened to the day long debate at City Council on June 29. I am part of several organisations which have taken public positions on these matters. I am listening to all the town-hall speakers. On the surface, positions appear oppositional and divisive. Yet I am hopeful. My cup is half full. Thanks for a mass global movement, led by Black Lives Matter, significant change is coming. Views vary on timelines, techniques, strategies, and tactics, yet we are now mostly pulling in the same direction – change in policing is coming sooner rather than later. And for that I remain hopeful and at your service.