

Toronto Police Services Board  
40 College Street  
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Matthew Wood  
Toronto, ON

August 28, 2024

Re: Consultation on Police Action in Respect of Protests, Demonstrations, and Occupations

Dear Board Members:

As a former Divisional Planner with the Toronto Police Service (TPS), where I served for 10 years, and a trained member of the Service's Public Order Unit, I have extensive experience in developing and implementing operational plans for public order scenarios. My insights are further informed by my graduate degree in public policy, past role as a part-time professor at the Seneca Polytechnic School of Public Safety, and military experience, where I served Canada for nearly 18 years. Based on these experiences, I would like to address critical gaps in the current approach to public order management within TPS—particularly concerning:

1. Leadership training,
2. The role of incident commanders in planning,
3. The limitations of Incident Management System training, and
4. Lack of institutional knowledge sharing

**Inadequate Leadership Training in Policing**

As I've outlined in my article "The leadership imperative: Police leader development in Ontario,"<sup>i</sup> for the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police *HQ Magazine*, the leadership training provided to police officers, particularly within TPS, is woefully inadequate. Today's police leaders are expected to navigate complex and rapidly evolving challenges, yet the training they receive fails to equip them with the necessary skills. This is a stark contrast to my military experience, where leadership development is continuous and structured, ensuring that leaders at every level are prepared to handle their responsibilities effectively. This gap in police training not only undermines the confidence of the officers but also jeopardizes the success of operations where strategic leadership is crucial (as evidenced during the G8/G20 summit of 2010).

## **Lack of Management Involvement in Planning**

In my article "Planning Police Operations: Lessons from the Military,"<sup>iii</sup> co-authored with R. Maybee, I discussed the importance of direct involvement by incident commanders in the planning process. Unfortunately, in TPS, this involvement is often lacking. Police managers frequently delegate the responsibility of public order planning to constables (ie., Planners), who develop their strategies in isolation from those who will ultimately conduct the operation. This disjointed approach leads to operational plans that are disconnected from the realities of the situations they are intended to manage, leading on-the-ground managers to effectively abandon the plans altogether.

As a former Divisional Planner, I can attest that planning is often treated as a secondary duty, with many planners also responsible for tasks such as facility maintenance and asset management. This lack of dedicated focus, coupled with the absence of formal training, severely hampers the effectiveness of public order planning within the Service.

## **Limitations of Incident Management System Training**

TPS's reliance on IMS as the primary tool for incident management is fundamentally flawed when applied to public order operations. While IMS is effective for resource coordination during incidents, it lacks the strategic planning framework needed for planning complex operations in response to protests and demonstrations.

In my article "Planning Police Operations: Lessons from the Military," I highlight the absence of a dedicated planning process within TPS. Instead of adopting a comprehensive approach, TPS has diluted the military's SMEAC (Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, Command) proforma into a mere checklist, stripping it of its strategic value. This reductionist approach fails to engage planners in the thorough, iterative processes outlined in the Canadian Forces' Operational Planning Process that are essential for effective planning.

Importantly, TPS Planners do not receive any training whatsoever to perform their roles, let alone conduct operational planning, further undermining the development of effective public order strategies.

## **Lack of Knowledge Sharing and After-Action Reviews**

Another critical issue is the absence of a formalized process for after-action reviews (AARs, ie., debriefs) following public order incidents. In my experience, these reviews are not routinely conducted, and when they are, the lessons learned are not shared across the organization as a matter of practice. This lack of institutional learning prevents the service from improving its response to future incidents and hinders the development of more effective public order strategies.

During my tenure as a divisional planner, I faced significant resistance to conducting AARs, which are crucial for identifying and learning from operational shortcomings. Even when AARs were conducted, they rarely involved those who participated in the operation, limiting their effectiveness. This resistance reflects a broader reluctance within TPS to engage in reflective practices, perpetuating a cycle of repeated mistakes and missed opportunities for improvement.

The prevailing "management by exception" leadership approach within TPS (ie., addressing issues only after they arise) is another factor contributing to this problem. This norm is the opposite of proactive problem-solving and stifles organizational learning. A cultural shift towards proactive leadership practices and the routine use of AARs is essential for TPS to move beyond its current reactive stance and toward a more effective public order management approach.

## **Conclusion**

In light of the above concerns, I strongly recommend that the new Public Order Policy include provisions for comprehensive leadership training, ensuring that those in command positions are fully prepared to handle the complexities of public order management. Additionally, incident commanders must be actively involved in the planning process, and the current reliance on IMS training should be reevaluated in favour of more strategic, planning-focused training.

Moreover, it is crucial to establish a standardized planning process, to include the requirement for after-action reviews, and to ensure that the lessons learned from these reviews are disseminated across the organization. By addressing these gaps, the Toronto Police Service can enhance its ability to manage public order situations effectively, ensuring that operations are conducted in a manner that respects the rights of individuals while maintaining public safety.

I am available to provide further, in-depth commentary on these matters and would welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of a more robust and effective public order policy.

Respectfully,



Matthew Wood, CD, MPPAL

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<sup>i</sup> Wood, M. (2024, Jun 6). The leadership imperative: Leader development in Ontario. HQ Magazine. <https://oacp.fthinker.ca/articles/the-leadership-imperative-leader-development-in-ontario>

<sup>ii</sup> Wood, M. & Maybee, R. (2023, Mar 8). Planning police operations: Lessons from the military. Blue Line. <https://www.blueline.ca/planning-police-operations-lessons-from-the-military/>