

Outcomes of Redwater RCMP Community Engagement 2020

As per the 2020 Fall Redwater Community Engagement initiative which was open to all residents from in the following geographic areas:

Abee, Amelia, Coronado, Egremont, Half Moon Lake, Lost Point Lake, Newbrook, Opal, Radway, Redwater, Thorhild County, and Sturgeon County (North and East of Gibbons).

This initiative was open to submissions between the dates of Monday, September 14, 2020 to Monday September 28, 2020. It was developed to provide a forum where residents could bring forth any of their policing concerns to the Detachment Commander and have their concerns published along with the corresponding responses and/or action plans to address the issues, if applicable.

Following the deadline for submissions, I received some responses from community members. In addition, I have taken this opportunity to answer some other common questions that I am typically asked. I've summarized them below.

Concern #1:

Why is it alright to operate off-highway vehicles on the streets in the town of Redwater?

Answer #1:

In Alberta the Traffic Safety Act defines an off-highway vehicle as any motorized mode of transportation built for cross-country travel on land, water, snow, ice, or marsh or swamp land or on other natural terrain. This includes ATVs, UTVs, side-by-sides, and snowmobiles. The Alberta Traffic Safety Act states that *“an off-highway vehicle may not be operated on any highway, road, or ditch unless permission has been expressly granted. In the case of a provincial highway, the Minister may by ‘order’ or ‘permit’ authorize such vehicles along any portion of a highway. In the case of a municipality, the council of a municipality may, through bylaw, authorize such vehicles along any portion of a highway, which includes the ditches alongside the roadway”* providing the off-highway vehicle is currently registered and insured.

We then have to take a look at each town and county to determine if they have *“authorized such vehicles along any portion of a highway, which includes the ditches alongside the roadway”*. Each is as follows:

- **Town of Redwater:** “Traffic Safety Bylaw” **allows** off-highway vehicles to be operated within the corporate limits of the town of Redwater if the driver is over



14 yrs of age and they are travelling the most direct route when going to and returning from activities outside the Town's corporate limits between the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. with a maximum speed of 20 kmph.

- **Sturgeon County:** Off-highway vehicles **allowed** between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and midnight and provided the operator is wearing a helmet, has a valid licence, travels only on the extreme right-handed portion of the road in single file (unless there are signs that prohibit travel), have one working headlight and taillight, and are currently registered and insured with a max speed of 30 kmph.

- **Thorhild County:**
 - **Hamlet of Thorhild:** Off-highway vehicles **allowed** between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 11:00 p.m. on a county highway within the Hamlet, travel in the same direction of traffic on that side of the highway, for the purposes of exiting or entering the hamlet and from the operator's residence, and for traveling to and from the beach and for the purpose of snow vehicles accessing the lake, using the block roadway and walkway, using the most direct route, and are currently registered and insured.

 - **Thorhild County:** Off-highway vehicles are **allowed** to travel along the ditch, but not the grade top, using the right hand side that is the same side as traffic flow on the grade top during all hours of the day and night.

Concern #2:

The Redwater detachment has a traffic safety unit. Can they make patrols through the town on their way out and on return from their highway patrols?

Answer #2:

The Redwater Integrated Traffic Unit (ITU) is a separate unit from the Redwater General Duty Detachment. The Redwater ITU has offices in and is based out of the Redwater Detachment. The Redwater ITU consists of 7 RCMP members (1 Sgt and 6 Cst) and has a mandate *"To enhance public safety by reducing harm and hazardous behaviours on Alberta roadways through strategic partnerships, enforcement, education and crime reduction initiatives."* The Redwater ITU is responsible for not only patrolling the Redwater Detachment area but also patrols the areas of Smoky Lake, Thorsby, and Boyle.

The Redwater Detachment area, as a whole, benefits from having the Redwater ITU and its 7 members based out of the Redwater Detachment. These benefits can include an increased police presence in both the towns and rural areas, shorter response times, increased enforcement resulting in safer communities and roads, and proactive checkstops and patrols.

Members of the Redwater detachment make it a priority to conduct both reactive and proactive patrols. The Redwater ITU routinely bolsters these patrols during their day-to-day activities and when they are patrolling in the area.

Concern #3:

Is there a way to increase patrols and visibility of police in the town of Redwater?

Answer #3:

While members of the Redwater detachment make it a priority to conduct both reactive and proactive patrols, unfortunately they cannot be everywhere at once. Just because you may not see us, does not mean that we haven't been patrolling the area. We do conduct regular patrols throughout the day and the night and for obvious reasons violators and criminals tend to wait until police are no longer around to commit their bad acts. While crimes and traffic offences are committed when members are not at a particular location, it should be noted that when members are on patrol at a particular location it potentially prevents a crime and traffic offences from taking place. There is no way to know how many criminal and traffic offences have been prevented as a result of these proactive patrols. In addition, as I have previously reported, the Redwater detachment utilizes both overt and covert patrols to target problem areas and catch offenders.

Concern #4:

General Concern regarding the response times to property crimes.

Answer #4:

Alberta RCMP cannot speak to specific response times in terms of averages or estimates as they vary significantly from area-to-area and incident-to-incident based on a number of factors including: geographical challenges that come with the vast size of many of our detachment areas; road and weather conditions; the level of urgency of the call for service in question; as well as the volume and level of urgency of other calls for service we may be responding to at the time.



When responding to calls for service members prioritize these calls and their response to them. If there is a criminal act in progress and a risk to the public or involved parties, these are responded to first to ensure the safety of everyone.

To address the geographical challenges our members face, the Alberta RCMP implemented a new Closest Car service. Dispatch closely monitors the location of frontline members on patrol in order to send the closest car to a call for service, regardless of jurisdictional boundaries i.e: A Fort Saskatchewan member might be closest to a call in Redwater jurisdiction and that member will respond as opposed to waiting for a Redwater member to respond.

The Redwater detachment members make it a point to show up in person, when possible, to speak with complainants and victims in relation to the occurrences that they are involved in or reported on.

Concern #5:

General Concern regarding the vast area the RCMP have to patrol with limited staff members. Is there enough officers for the area?

Answer #5:

Earlier this year, the Government of Alberta announced increased funding for added RCMP resources, specifically 75 police officers and 60 civilian support positions. Approximately 500 RCMP officers and civilian positions will be added across the province over the next five years, including the new positions announced for 2020/21.

All police services have a set number of resources to deploy as efficiently as we can. In order to deploy these members appropriately we thoroughly analyze calls-for-service, operational intelligence, and emerging crime trends. Reporting crime impacts how we deploy our members. We need to know where the needs are before we can assign the resources in the most effective manner possible. We deploy resources across the province based on an analysis of calls for service, local knowledge, intelligence, and current trends.

Workload analysis includes factors such as travel time, call volume, the type of crimes occurring in the area, amount of time required for investigations, size of detachment, and time available for proactive policing, which includes: strategic patrols, community engagement, visiting schools, and attending community events. Detachment Commanders have close ties to the communities they serve and they meet regularly with local leaders to ensure community input is considered in decision making. The RCMP is glad to engage at all levels and we are always appreciative of new ways to hear from our communities. This means that if you witness or are a victim of a crime,

ensure you report it to us so that we can take all information into account when developing future plans to address and prevent crime in the area.

There is much more to the policing service that the RCMP provides at the detachment level than just the officers you see patrolling in a police vehicle. Behind that officer, and providing service to your community, is an extensive criminal intelligence and analysis network along with specialized support units like the Emergency Response Teams, Major Crimes Units, Integrated Drug Units, Traffic Services, the Alberta Internet Child Exploitation Unit, Federal Policing (Drugs and Serious and Organized Crime) and the list goes on. We have resources available to be deployed on a timely basis to respond to all levels of emergency in any and all locations across the province.

Concern #6:

With the provincial increase to municipalities for policing, what are the tax implications? Should the federal government increase financial contributions?

Answer #6:

For those municipalities under 15 000 residents the funding formula is 30% funding from the Government of Canada and 70% funded by the Province of Alberta. Under the new agreement the Province of Alberta is transferring a portion of their costs, the 70%, to the municipalities and the federal government is maintaining their 30% funding. This change has no effect on the level of service provided by the Redwater detachment as the funding as a whole has not changed. There has not been any increase or decrease in our resources as a result.

Concern #7:

Reckless driving and speeding on highways.

Answer #7:

Reckless driving and speeding on highways is a common concern expressed by all and can greatly effect traffic safety. To date, province-wide there have been a total of 100 fatal motor vehicle collisions in Alberta, down from 123 fatal collisions at this time in 2019. 4 fatal motor vehicle collisions have taken place in the Redwater Detachment area this year. The Redwater Detachment and the Redwater ITU actively patrols the detachment area with the goal of balancing enforcement with education to make the roads safer for all users.



The vast majority of people operating motor vehicles seem to follow all the laws when there is a police car around and as a result appropriate enforcement action cannot always take place. But, when members are out on patrol they are potentially preventing these acts from happening although there is no way to know how many criminal and provincial offences are prevented with proactive patrols.

Traffic Safety is currently one of the Redwater detachment's priority issues for this year as identified by the public last year. As a result the Redwater detachment routinely engages in pro-active enforcement throughout the year and has also scheduled additional enforcement shifts throughout the year.

Of note, police can issue violation tickets to the registered owner of a motor vehicle without ever witnessing the offence providing there is a witness to the offence that is willing to provide a statement with details including the vehicle licence plate, and attend court to testify if required.

Concern #8:

Drug related activities and other criminal behaviour in the area.

Answer #8:

We've got a plan and it's working. The Alberta RCMP has developed a Crime Reduction Strategy that enables us to more effectively reduce criminal activity in rural communities. The Alberta Crime Reduction Strategy is a comprehensive, intelligence-led approach to policing that aims to break the cycle of criminal activity over the long term. This approach enables police to identify repeat offenders, crime hotspots, and conduct targeted enforcement and prevention initiatives. Approximately 10% of offenders are responsible for 50-60% of crime in Canada. By focusing on volume crimes perpetrated by a small number of repeat offenders, the RCMP will reduce the instances of crime over the long term. This will result in reduction in the number of service calls overall and will allow officers more time to focus on investigations and engage with the communities we serve.

Criminal Code Offences are declining in Alberta, as a whole, when looking at January to August 2020 vs. 2019:

- Property Crime: 10% decrease
- Other Criminal Code: 19% decrease
- Break and Enter: 17% decrease
- Theft Under \$5000: 24% decrease
- **Total Criminal Code Offences: 9% decrease**

Criminal Code offences are also declining in the Redwater Detachment area when you look at the same period of time (January to August 2020 vs. 2019):

- Property Crime: 38% decrease
- Other Criminal Code: 19% decrease
- Break and Enter: 32% decrease
- Theft Under \$5000: 64% decrease
- **Total Criminal Code Offences: 30% decrease**

**The Redwater Detachment area trends were similar in most areas prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.*

We are continuing to collaborate with our communities, partner agencies, and government at all levels – we must work together to build stronger, safer communities. Our number one priority is the safety and security of the public and of our officers. We are committed to providing the most effective, efficient policing possible and being responsive to the ever-changing policing needs in Alberta and the Redwater Detachment area.

Concern #9:

Resource officers being removed from schools.

Answer #9:

In September of this year the Edmonton Public Schools announced that the school resource officers deployed by the Edmonton Police service would not be returning this year while the program is being independently reviewed while a replacement program is being considered.

The RCMP have continued with our school resource officer initiative in Alberta and have not removed officers from schools. The School Resource Officers provide support to staff, and interact with youth. The program results in positive relationships between the RCMP and key government/community organizations, increased awareness/support of the program and allow SRO's to better meet both the learning and support needs of the schools/students. Misconceptions students had about the police were cleared up and youth criminal activity/youth-related complaints to the RCMP decreased as well.

The Redwater Detachment does not and has not had a school resource officer position assigned to the detachment. These are positions that are funded by the communities and schools boards and an agreement is entered into made that sees a School Resource Officer position created and assigned to the schools that are part of the agreement. This remains a viable option today.

Concern #10:

What can we do to help the RCMP?

Answer #10:

No matter the challenges, the solutions remain the same. They can be found in the partnerships between concerned, committed stakeholders. Governments at all levels (Federal, Provincial and Municipal), Agencies, organizations and citizens all working together to build stronger, safer communities. From an RCMP perspective, there is an expectation that our detachments be engaged in, and with, the community. That means consulting with residents and community leaders (as we are doing today with this Town Hall) to establish policing priorities and assisting with public safety issues. We are committed to having regular communication with community leaders, providing reports and updates, being involved in community activities and events when possible - and through these and numerous other means - developing positive trusting relationships with the community.

The other perspective applies to the community side and here we can only ask or encourage. We can ask communities to engage in working with us, and we can provide leadership on community issues or challenges. Communities rely on the police to contribute and assist where appropriate. Being a part of positive trusting relationships is necessary for public safety.

We need engaged, involved citizens contributing to community safety just as we need engaged, involved police officers. To use an over-used phrase... we cannot put a police officer on every corner. We rely on our residents to provide additional eyes and ears. Rural Crime Watch and your local Citizens on Patrol is a great example of engagement from the community and what's possible when people come together with a common goal of reporting suspicious activity and reducing crime in their area.

I would like to thank everyone who participated in this "Virtual Town Hall". I would also like to acknowledge several individuals who expressed their appreciation and thanks for the work that the members of the Redwater Detachment do every day. Without the support of the communities, we cannot do what we do.

Regards,

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