



# Community Focus Groups

The summary of an external scanning component towards the development of the 2021-2023 Strategic Business Plan

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# Executive Summary

The Waterloo Regional Police Service held a series of 21 hour-long virtual dialogue sessions across September and October 2020, focusing on particular populations that had less trust and confidence in police based on the disaggregated results of the Community Index of Wellbeing (CIW) survey in 2018 and stakeholder consultation required by legislation. Some sessions were scheduled upon request, and recognizing intersectionality, community members were not limited to attending just one dialogue session nor filtering their responses through just one lens. Group sizes ranged from 0-28 attendees (average ~7). Most of the qualitative results were gathered through these focus groups, though some additional results were obtained through one-on-one interviews, e-mail submissions, and through community representatives acting as proxies to gather responses on WRPS' behalf.

Participants expressed specific *public safety concerns*:

- break and enters,
- cybercrime,
- domestic violence,
- fraud,
- hate crime,
- human trafficking,
- missing persons,
- prevention,
- safety downtown and at night,
- traffic,
- weapons, and
- youth terms and conditions compliance.

Participants acknowledged *current issues* that may influence policing and outcomes in the context of 2020 that should be considered in developing priorities over the next three years:

- covid-19: elevated levels of acute crisis; domestic violence; substance abuse,
- co-response models where police aren't necessarily the first responders or the lead/receive specialized training,
- homelessness,
- mental health and brain health,
- poverty,
- social media,
- support for newcomers, international students, youth, group homes, and seniors,
- unemployment,
- wellbeing checks, and
- youth programming.



*Relationship building* infused every discussion. *Across groups*, what the community is looking for in their police service includes:

- Trust-building,
- Collaboration and partnerships,
- Respect and caring,
- Accountability and transparency, and
- Listening and understanding.

Participants were also prompted to discuss *how WRPS could better work with the community, what police should do more of /less of, what is working and what police are missing*. More than one group endorsed these statements of focus or need:

- Advocacy at the national level (re: anti-bias, mental health),
- Acknowledge trauma,
- Community Resource Officers' value added,
- School Resource Officers' value added,
- Know your rights – the public could use education,
- Image of police – ongoing work affected by events outside of the Region,
- Information sharing, considering:
  - language barriers
  - some in-person still preferred, don't use technology exclusively
  - number of mediums requested
    - Stats and reports
    - Media releases
    - Social media
    - Using existing community networks (e.g. through people e.g. leaders, through places e.g. churches)
    - Booklets
    - National level statements
    - Workshops, townhalls
    - Virtual meetings
    - Website
    - Mobile apps (e.g. Slack)
- Leverage points: recruitment, training, procedures, leadership,
- Not always clear who to call,
- Referrals and follow-ups,
- Explore more restorative justice, alternatives to laying charges,
- Self-reflect: examine biases, develop cultural competency, early intervention discipline, representation - but also understanding; composition and messaging,
- Budget; there were discussions and questions surrounding this, acknowledging that social services have not caught up to the marginalized needs but not necessarily a call to defund police,
- Strong desire to continue the conversation, be the link to the community, offers to deliver training, be part of an advisory group, and
- Visibility; but also consider no uniform.



The main ideas *between groups* are also summarized in the report, as well as additional sources of feedback (Regional Council, EngageWR Townhalls, and an example of a Wellbeing Waterloo Region working group). Along with other data collection pieces this external scan in the form of focus groups helps satisfy the stakeholder consultation component of the Strategic Business Plan (SBP) development for the Police Services Board (PSB). Next steps will include operationalizing these themes and further collaborating with the community.



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## Introduction

Dialogue sessions are an opportunity to hear first-hand from community members about their public safety concerns and policing priorities. It is a chance to dive deeper into quantitative results and ask about the “why” behind the “what”. It is also an opportunity to obtain feedback from populations that may be underrepresented in third-party conducted, statistically stratified, community surveys. For these reasons, WRPS added focus groups to the external scanning workplan over the past three business planning cycles. Along with other data collection pieces it helps satisfy the stakeholder consultation component of the Strategic Business Plan (SBP) development for the Police Services Board (PSB).

## Methodology

### Materials and Research Approach

Strategic Services consulted with the Inclusivity unit and Corporate Communications unit to build upon an inventory of community contacts. These community contacts have been gathered over time and include leaders of associations, organizations, and services, or in some cases, general or personal e-mail accounts. Electronic letters of invitation to attend a focus group themed towards a particular population were sent with date, time, and Zoom log in details. Recipients were encouraged to forward the invitation to others (snowball recruitment). The link to the online survey, running concurrently, was included as a form of alternative participation. A sample set of questions to prompt dialogue were offered ahead of time for consideration. There was flexibility to allow the conversation to be steered towards whatever aspect of policing the participants were passionate about or brought them to the meeting.

A series of 21 hour-long, virtual, evening and afternoon sessions were set across September and October, focusing on particular populations that had less trust and confidence in police based on the disaggregated results of the Community Index of Wellbeing (CIW) survey in 2018 and stakeholder consultation required by legislation. Some sessions were scheduled upon request when the community expressed interest, and recognizing intersectionality, community members were not limited to attending just one dialogue session nor filtering their responses through just one lens. RSVP was not required though advance notice of any required accommodations was appreciated. Most of the qualitative results were gathered through these dialogue sessions. Some additional results were obtained through one-on-one interviews, e-mail submissions, and through community representatives acting as proxies to gather responses on WRPS' behalf. This worked well given the proxy's existing trusted relationships and standing scheduled meetings, and neutralized any discomfort with technology or speaking to police non-anonymously.

At the beginning of each session there were brief introductions and a message from the Board, the objectives were stated, research consent was reviewed, intersectionality was recognized, and a land acknowledgement was offered. Participants could mute/unmute themselves, use the raise hand feature, or give a visual signal to contribute to the conversation, as well as use the chat feature to offer comments, resources, or contact information. Participants could choose to turn on their video or not; participants could edit their displayed names. The sessions were not recorded. Scribed notes of the discussion were not attributed to individuals.

## Participants

Group sizes ranged from 0-28 people, averaging about 7 people in attendance per focus group, which is in the ideal range for this type of consultation. It balances having enough people to represent different points of view or endorse ideas, but not so many people that speaking time is limited. Participants may have represented their voices and/or the voices of their community.

Representing WRPS and the PSB, there was always at least:

- a facilitator,
- a logistics coordinator/note-taker,
- a PSB member,
- a WRPS Executive, and
- a member of the Inclusivity unit

in attendance. WRPS members with established ties to certain communities or particular language skills were also invited to the sessions and attended as available.

## Results

### Public Safety Concerns

Public safety is a priority and will be addressed in the Strategic Business Plan. Crime statistics, calls for service, and trends as well as legislative requirements to address core functions of policing will shape some goals, objectives, and performance indicators. To complement this, however, is consultation gauging participants' biggest safety concerns. Compiled across all focus groups, the following were mentioned:

- break and enters,
- cybercrime,
- domestic violence,
- fraud,
- hate crime,
- human trafficking,
- missing persons,
- prevention,
- safety downtown and at night,
- traffic,
- weapons, and
- youth terms and conditions compliance.

Participants were less able to articulate what it would take to create change in these areas (which will need to be operationalized by police) but were more able to express ideal outcomes. They were of the opinion that if WRPS made progress to reduce these crimes/issues over the next 3 years, our Region would be a safer, healthier, more connected community with a greater sense of wellbeing and belonging.

## Current Context

It is also relevant to consider the ecological context of 2020 in forecasting priorities over the next three years. Participants identified some current issues non-criminal in nature that, if addressed by police, would further support community vitality. For example:

- covid-19: elevated levels of acute crisis; domestic violence; substance abuse,
- co-response models where police aren't necessarily the first responders or the lead, and receive specialized training,
- homelessness,
- mental health and brain health,
- poverty,
- social media,
- support for newcomers, international students, youth, group homes, and seniors,
- unemployment,
- wellbeing checks, and
- youth programming.

The focus group participants saw these as challenges that could extend to 2023 or beyond. Their influence could affect policing and thus our Board and organization should be mindful of these issues while developing of the next business plan.

## Themes Across Groups

Across the 21 focus groups and the feedback provided directly, there were commonalities.



Displayed above are the prevalent keywords the public wants to see from their police service. Relationships infused every discussion. Potentially elevated to pillars of WRPS' approach over the next three years but not limited to the Strategic Business Plan, look for these descriptors to be built into WRPS' Mission, Vision, and especially Values - characteristics that colour everything police do.

Participants were also prompted to discuss how WRPS could better work with the community, what police should do more of /less of, what is working and what police are missing. More than one group endorsed these statements of focus or need:

- Advocacy at the national level (re: anti-bias, mental health),
- Acknowledge trauma,
- Community Resource Officers' value added,
- School Resource Officers' value added,
- Know your rights – the public could use education,
- Image of police – ongoing work affected by events outside of the Region,
- Information sharing, considering
  - language barriers
  - some in-person still preferred, don't use technology exclusively
  - number of mediums requested
    - Stats
    - Reports
    - Media releases
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    - Using existing community networks (e.g. through people e.g. leaders, through places e.g. churches)
    - Booklets
    - National level statements
    - Workshops
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    - Website
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- Leverage points: recruitment, training, procedures, leadership,
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- Visibility; but also consider no uniform.



## Themes Between Groups

Having covered some of the more prevalent themes across groups, described generally, the main ideas that emerged at each session are hereby described more specifically. The groups with zero attendees are not listed, accounting for why there are not 21 group-specific summaries. Feedback from populations of interest obtained outside of the Zoom sessions was included in the “Themes Across Groups”. There was tremendous value in hearing from the community firsthand.

### *Caribbean*

- The Caribbean community is a diverse group composed of many ethnicities with different needs and perspectives.
- The Service needs to focus on addressing implicit bias through training and through improved screening when recruiting new officers.
- Protocols police follow should not change depending on who they are dealing with. All people should be treated the same and assumptions should not be made.
- Need to increase efforts on relationship building. This engagement should focus more on social development versus being enforcement based.
- We want everyone to feel accepted and not threatened and want the police to be comfortable in engaging with the community.
- We want long-term solutions and action; action that is monitored through measureable outcomes.
- There needs to be more mental health supports in the community and police should not be responding to mental health calls.
- Increase race-based training and experiential learning opportunities at all levels of the organization.
- Increase accountability for officers (address officers that are known to show and act on biases).
- Want the Service to address their issues and not rely on the community for solutions.
- Look at areas in the Region that are over-policed and pull back on some policing.
- Dig deeper into data and take action when required.
- Information with the community should be shared in as many ways as possible, including engaging the associations.
- Shifts in the police budget could have a positive impact on realizing change in behaviours.

### *Chinese & Taiwanese*

- The community appreciates the Service’s support and attendance at events (e.g. Chinese New Year’s) and encourages an increase in attendance at future events.
- Open to looking at new ways to partner, including hosting seminars and town halls with members of the community to address questions from the community and to provide the Service with an opportunity to share information.
- For many members of the community, there is a language barrier. WRPS is encouraged to look at ways to address the language barrier through the use of translators and providing written information in different languages.
- Because not all members of the community have access to go online, WRPS is encouraged to publish information in other ways (e.g. booklet).
- Community members are interested in receiving information on neighbourhood criminal activity and statistics.

- Provide general information to the community and address items like when to contact the police for assistance versus bylaw, particularly for newcomers and older adults.
- There are many international students that are away from their families for school. Look at ways to support their needs and engage them in discussions.
- Keep an eye on potential on discrimination against the Chinese community as it relates to COVID-19.
- There is currently an issue with the police image in the community. Of the opinion WRPS is doing well - even at our protests, everyone was respectful and the Police Service was there doing their job with respect. But image is something you will need to keep an eye on.

### *Seniors*

- The Seniors Support Team has been very successful and does great work. With the aging demographic, additional resources will be required for this Team. Additional work should also be done to promote awareness and visibility of Team, especially given that the Team is no longer located at Carizon and is at Headquarters.
- Social isolation for seniors has been an ongoing issue, but is now more of a concern due to COVID. Need to look at ways to promote wellness checks and ways to reach more seniors in the Region to conduct these wellness checks.
- Need specialized training for officers to support interactions with the senior population, including training on age-related disease.
- Need to recognize the need for caregiver supports.
- Need to consider how the police manage mental health calls, which have or will likely increase due to the pandemic. Need more funding for IMPACT.
- There needs to be more education on matters related to senior support (i.e. how to report abuse, caregiver support, crime trends, including fraud/scams).
- When doing education with seniors, there are opportunities for online education, but we also need to keep in mind that many are not computer literate and we need to look at ways to reach everyone (e.g. newsletters, newspapers, etc.).
- There are opportunities to communicate information to seniors through the various agencies in the community. Police need strong partnerships with these agencies.
- Police need to have the resources available to make referrals to other agencies for support.
- When police are responding to calls, they need to keep in mind that some seniors or other members of vulnerable populations may be frightened by the uniform.
- Need a long-term strategy to support seniors and friendly aging. This includes more prevention activities.
- When responding to calls from the senior population, better to respond in-person versus redirecting to online or phone reporting. Responding officers may also need to take an extended period of time to speak with individuals and they should be supported to take the time they need to meet individual needs. Officers should also not automatically defer to a family member for information.
- Values when dealing with the senior population include respect and patience.
- Poverty is an issue for many seniors, which can lead to other issues (e.g. mental health and social isolation).
- Seniors deserve justice when they've been victimized.



### *Mental Health Care*

- Concern that there are not proper mental health supports available 24/7 in the Region. Caregivers have to rely on police to respond when there is an incident that falls outside of regular business hours.
- The IMPACT Team is functioning well but requires more resources to meet demand.
- Many people are not aware of the IMPACT Team, so we need to increase awareness of this service.
- The relationships the Police Service develops with mental health agencies is important. The Community Resources Officer program is a valuable program and the relationships they have developed with agencies and their clients have been very beneficial. In order to meet demand, additional CROs were suggested.
- Caregivers need to know where to access mental health supports in the Region.
- May want to look at reestablishing a mobile crisis team that is not led by police, but is led by crisis workers.
- Would like to see a focus on prevention to avoid the crisis situations.
- There are concerns about a lack of police response related to calls from agencies looking for support, follow-up and referrals.
- We need to acknowledge that interventions used to deal with a client that has a neurological delay disorder would differ from interventions provided to someone dealing with mental health issues.
- Need more education and training for dealing with mental health related calls.
- Many newcomers to Canada struggle with PTSD and other mental health issues. It is important that when responding to calls where there is a language barrier that a translation service is provided as quickly as possible.
- It would be beneficial to host workshops with newcomers to provide education on laws in Canada and to build trust with police.
- Not all officers handle mental health calls well – need additional training.
- When dealing with mental health calls for youth, need to consider their current developmental stage.
- We cannot criminalize social issues (i.e. poverty, homelessness, addiction, etc.). Need to come up with solutions to address these issues.
- For programs like the vulnerable person registry, the information in the registry is not be provided to officers. The information in the registry needs to be more accessible to call takers and officers.

### *Businesses*

- Business owners have expressed concern over the behaviours they are seeing in the downtown and its effect on their businesses.
- The availability of social supports has not kept up with the need. The downtown core is seeing more people that suffer from mental health and addiction issues. The behaviours are escalating and it can make people uncomfortable with coming downtown.
- The Discovery Team has been successful in reaching people in need and supporting businesses.
- The BIA has a very positive and collaborative relationship with WRPS and appreciates having officers dedicated to the downtown core.
- The BIA is grateful for the CROs, but could use more. The CROs have made a significant difference and business owners feel more comfortable.
- There may be opportunities to use technology to improve communications/service.



### *Social Services (2 sessions)*

- Proactive engagement and upstream preventative programs with officers and the community is important and helps build relationships and trust. Also important to include younger youth in these engagement opportunities.
- There are very positive experiences when dealing with the Community Resources Officers and engagement officers, but when dealing with other officers, the experiences and interactions vary, including both positive and negative interactions.
- Police need a consistent approach when dealing with release terms. When release terms are not enforced, it reinforces poor behaviour.
- Police also need a consistent approach to missing persons, particularly teens.
- Police need to ensure people understand their rights. This information should ideally be shared in proactive engagement, but also provided during an interaction with police, if necessary.
- When performing wellness checks or responding to overdoses, we need to consider whether the police should be leading the response or whether there are opportunities for a social worker or paramedics to lead the response. Seeing someone in a police uniform could trigger a negative response.
- There may be communication barriers related to language or cognition function. Officers need to identify the needs of those they are interacting with and make sure they are making their needs accessible.
- Important values include fairness, accountability, compassion, patience.
- Look at the role of the School Resource Officer and ensure that they are working as collaborative partners and are working towards better outcomes.
- Suggestions for improved communications: make it accessible in multiple languages, formats (reports, videos), use social media, use larger community organizations to get information out, keep in mind that technology may be a barrier for some, ensure to connect with youth and newcomers.
- Need more diversity within the Service to better represent the demographics of the community.
- There is a lack of consistency in how officers respond to mental health calls. The variation in response is challenging and results in people not wanting to call the police for assistance.
- There should be a baseline for skill sets and service expectations when responding to calls.
- When responding to calls, officers need to listen and be flexible in their response and base it on the situation at hand.
- There has been some good relationship building with WRPS, which has resulted in an increase in referrals and support for survivors of sexual assault. Would encourage WRPS to take advantage of training offered by the Sexual Assault Support Centre.
- Would request that when the Sexual Assault Support Centre gets new officers assigned to sexual assault services that these officers go to the Centre to meet staff and make connections.
- Ongoing relationship building is important, as it helps build trust and creates an understanding about the need in community.
- Extend the concept of the Family Violence Project to other areas.
- Need a space for clients to share their stories with WRPS in a safe environment.
- Ways to measure improvements – measure anger level in the community, measure the number of contacts and engagement in the community, measure the community's confidence in police, monitor crime rates and monitor statistics like reporting levels.



- Need to focus on anti-human trafficking initiatives. This includes engagement and education with vulnerable populations that are most affected by human-trafficking (e.g. low income, disenfranchised, etc.).

### *Youth and Young Adults*

- Need greater communication between police and agencies that serve youth. Police need to be aware of programs offered by these agencies and need to bring in the agencies when they are interacting with youth.
- Police need to recognize the past trauma that many youth have experienced. Past trauma will affect police interactions with youth. Their parents' interactions with police may also influence how a youth feels about and interact with police.
- When dealing with youth, police need to take the time to deescalate, listen, validate their feelings and to understand where they are coming from.
- Youth often have multiple interactions with the same officer; if punitive, can negatively result in feeling targeted; if proactive, can positively be relationship building, particularly with SROs.
- We need to look at the role of the SROs. There is often a conflict when SROs are trying to build relationships and trust with students and are also investigating incidents. Agencies may also feel uncomfortable in engaging with SROs if they feel the youth they are supporting will not be treated properly by police.
- Need to encourage more trauma-informed training.
- Continue to utilize the IMPACT Team for mental health calls.
- The model used by the Community Resources Officers (CRO) is one that is built on developing relationships and trust with the community. We need more of that.
- We need more community training in areas like violent risk assessment.
- Follow-up with youth after calls or interactions with police needs to improve and there needs to a consistent approach to follow-up.
- Communications from WRPS needs to come in various formats and languages.
- Youth need a voice in this discussion and there needs to be more intentionality when comes to hearing directly from youth.
- Human trafficking is a concern in our community and one that needs more attention and resources. Police need to work with agencies to support victims and provide a safe space for victims to come forward and to feel safe. There also needs to be more attention on the prevention of human trafficking.
- Staff in group homes have expressed concern that there is a perception that police do not care about youth in their group homes.
- We want to create an environment for youth where they feel safe and feel a sense of belonging.
- Given the Pandemic, there are concerns about the current a lack of programing and prevention programs that support youth.

### *Families*

- Encourage police that when responding to calls, they should be open to hearing the public's stories and some of their underlying issues or concerns.
- Some people are intimidated to seek services in the same facility where police also work out of. May need to consider how that could be addressed.
- We see an increase in police calls in areas where we have had to shut down programming, often due to funding. Need to ensure that these programs continue in order to reduce the need for a police response.

- Would encourage relationship building between police and communities, particularly at informal community events. Having those relationships will support police in their work when they need to respond to an incident.
- Need to keep in mind that many have experienced past trauma that might affect how they respond to police.
- Not all communities have the same positive and regular engagement with police.
- There are positive experiences when dealing with CROs, but when dealing with patrol officers, the experience varies.
- Would encourage additional trauma-informed training for officers.
- Need to look at other ways to manage repeat calls to avoid repeated trauma and interactions with police by doing more upstream work. Need to focus efforts on prevention and early interventions.
- There is concern that the Pandemic has resulted in an uptick in the acuity of calls for service and the need for social supports and that this need will continue to increase.
- Need manage the varying expectations in the community.

#### *Indigenous inclusive of First Nations, Métis, Inuit (2 sessions)*

- We need officers that are trained in culturally appropriate interactions. We also need specialized training and responses for the various populations in our community.
- We need more authentic and genuine engagement with the Indigenous community. This could include representation on various committees, including the Police Services Board, attendance at cultural events and ongoing communications and building equitable and trusting relationships.
- Need to review hiring policies and look at ways to remove barriers for Indigenous people when applying for positions at the Service.
- We need to look at change at a higher systems level and need a change in ideology.
- Need to know who to call when assistance is required. Clarify if it is a police response or if there is a more appropriate support service that could be engaged.
- Use Waterloo Wellbeing as a way to connect and communicate with the Indigenous community.
- The Grand River Métis Council is open to collaboration and partnership opportunities with WRPS. Need to define partnership. Note that these conversations are a starting point; having created openness can now build and get more specific about efforts.
- The Grand River Métis Council would encourage the Service to participate in educational opportunities around Métis culture and history and attendance at cultural events and school events.
- Would like to see an increase in awareness around the Métis People and an acknowledgement that they are a unique People.
- Would encourage ongoing communication and engagement between the Service and the Métis community. This can be facilitated through the Council.
- Would encourage the Service to transfer information when members transfer to other positions within the Service, so momentum in advancing our relationship with the Métis community is not lost.

#### *Francophone*

- The local area French schools see great benefit in the SRO program. Benefits include:
  - Quick and efficient responses to issues at the school.
  - Ability to develop positive relationships with the students and to be a positive role model.

- Provides the school with advice on dealing with issues, including being able to confirm whether an issue is criminal in nature.
- The French school board continues to be supportive of offering the SRO program in their schools and increased access to SROs.
- Suggestion to assign French speaking officers to the SRO program that can support French schools.
- Participants would like to see more engagement with the French community and to explore partnership opportunities.
- Would like to see an increased quality of French translation for items like surveys, newsletters, etc. It was noted that, in order to distribute materials at the French schools, the material must be in French.
- Would like to see access to French translation services when officers respond to calls.
- The following areas of concern for French students include use of social media and mental health. Participants would like to see supports from WRPS on these issues.
- Would like to see officers with more knowledge on the Francophone culture.
- Need to ensure that members of the Francophone community, particularly those that are high risk, have to access resources.

### *LGBTQ2S+*

- There needs to be more two-way communication with the LGBTQ2S+ community. Feedback has been provided in the past, but there was no follow-up with participants on what the Service heard or what they are doing with the feedback. The lack of two-way communication will deter people from participating at future sessions.
- When reporting back to the LGBTQ2S+ community, use the same channels that were used to communicate the engagement sessions.
- The Police have received a lot of feedback through the BLM movement and the Service should focus on addressing the feedback they've already received.
- Need to invest in relationship building and engagement and thought needs to go into finding safe spaces to have these discussions. Need to ensure there are opportunities for positive and intentional engagement.
- Members of the LGBTQ2S+ community want to feel supported by Police.
- Police need to focus on accountability and transparency.
- In the LGBTQ2S+ community, there is solidarity with other social movements (i.e. BLM and land back).
- The LGBTQ2S+ community has benefited from partnering with WRPS in the past, but the Service should not rely on certain members to carry those relationships. Those relationships needs to be built and fostered by all Service members.
- Would like to see additional training in areas like partner violence, family violence, mental health and anti-racism.
- Officers need to recognize the power imbalance, particularly when interacting with those from vulnerable or marginalized populations.
- The Police Service needs to acknowledge current deficits and address those.
- Concern that the pandemic will exacerbate issues of domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse.
- Need to ensure that strategic plans are developed based on local need.

### *Arabic*

- WRPS has a lot of support from the Arabic community. The community appreciates the supports and relationships with the WRPS.

- There were traffic safety concerns raised regarding trucks on the highway (e.g. excessive speed, lane use and lane changes) and excessive speed in school and residential areas. Additional enforcement in these areas was recommended.
- Additional engagement with the community, including youth, was encouraged. Ideas for this engagement include:
  - Monthly meetings with the WRPS and community to share concerns and provide an opportunity for WRPS to share information with the community.
  - Provide information on areas like family/domestic violence, cybercrime, clarification of rights, drug use and human trafficking.
  - Use existing relationships (e.g. Arab Women of Waterloo Region) to help get information out to the community.
- Support was expressed for the SRO program and concern was raised that it was put on pause.
- The language barrier is a concern and the following suggestions were provided:
  - Ensure officers are aware they have access to translation services.
  - Ensure that there are ways to translate WRPS online material (e.g. use of Google Translate).
  - Provide key information in various languages.
  - Connect Arab speaking officers with the Arab community.

### *Muslim*

- There is a lack of trust in the Muslim community towards police. Police need to work at building that trust, especially for newcomers. This could include police providing an orientation to newcomers on policing in our Region. Muslims, particularly men and young boys, feel like they are profiled by police, which increases their distrust in police.
- The Muslim community is very diverse and police need to recognize that the experiences and perceptions may vary within the Muslim community.
- The Service needs to increase its engagement with the Muslim community. This can be done by making connections within the community through cultural and religious organizations and setting up advisory committees that meet regularly.
- There needs to be an increase in police presence at Muslim community events and attendance should include varying officers.
- Police need additional training to address racism and stereotypes.
- There needs to be more diversity within the Police Service.
- Muslims often face conflict with neighbours. Although these incidents might not meet the threshold of a hate crime, they should be addressed.

### *Jewish*

- The community would like to see more engagement with the police and would like to see a point of contact they can connect with directly on issues.
- There needs to be recognition that the Jewish community is diverse (can identify as Jewish ethnicity, can identify with the Jewish religion) and members of their community can face very different challenges.
- With the current social climate, including in the US, there is concern that it could cause an uptick of anti-Semitism in our community.
- The Service was encouraged to increase its diversity within its workforce, though the answer is not solely in diversity. Diversity is a good step but it is not enough. "You don't know what you don't know". Need training and recognition of implicit bias; need more

than sensitivity training; need to hear from those with lived experiences and intersectional identities.

- Recognize the system; we are products of our systems. Examine policies, resources, plans.
- Police Board and Chief of Police have power and privilege to speak about issues and prevention and upstream approaches.
- Police need to avoid criminalizing social issues like addiction and homelessness and support preventive and up stream initiatives.
- Police need to do a better job at managing hate incidents, particularly for those incidents that don't meet the hate crime threshold.
- Members of the community would appreciate a police presence at places of worship during services.

## **Additional Stakeholder Consultations**

### **Regional Council**

Regional Councillors responded to the focus group questions via survey. They identified some public safety and community wellbeing issues; those with multiple endorsements included:

- traffic,
- break and enters,
- opioids / drug trafficking,
- guns and gangs,
- police visibility, and
- mental health training.

Council expressed that community interactions, community involvement, and communication were all working well. Exploring even more co-response models (such as IMPACT) was desirable. It may result in police responding less to social issues (e.g. mental health, homelessness) that are not crimes instead of being the first responder, sole responder, or responder by default. Recognizing that budget is a challenge, and looking for a practical response to the call for defunding police, Council is interested in ongoing cost reduction strategies (e.g. civilianization, automation).

### **EngageWR Anti-Racism Townhalls**

Two anti-racism townhalls were organized and facilitated through EngageWR in July 2020. The topic of police practices, conduct, and community relations did arise and thus these townhalls may also serve as a source of consultation for business planning purposes. Speakers registered in advance and were given an uninterrupted time slot to have their voice heard. To summarize the themes that emerged, the public is looking for anti-racism efforts from police that work towards outcomes of feeling safer, feeling assisted when in need, and not feeling targeted. in the form of:

- systems change, transformative change,
- ongoing commitment,
- seizing momentum; starting with a willingness to listen, want to see action,
- having Black, Indigenous, and People Of Colour (BIPOC) at the table and in positions for positive change (e.g. composition of Boards and committees),



- acknowledging racism is not happening in a silo, recognize the intersectionality,
- examining policy (e.g. hiring, advancement, transparency and zero tolerance discipline, respectful customer service),
- engaging police members, examining our culture and training, and
- reporting race-based data, disaggregated statistics, disproportionality.

### School Boards

The Waterloo Region Public and Catholic School Boards are currently reviewing the role of police in schools. As such, it was not deemed necessary to schedule a focus group for the purposes of strategic business planning. Rather, WRPS will await the results of these reviews and an academic partnership to help inform the course of working with youth.

### Wellbeing Waterloo Region

The Wellbeing Waterloo Region initiative is made up of several working groups. The Children and Youth Planning Table, and specifically their Data, Research, and Evaluation group, piloted a Youth Impact Survey in July 2020. Open to people aged 9-18 in the area, they responded to questions across nine focus areas or wellbeing. The group is currently publishing a series of research briefs to highlight the results. Among the first findings is the identified need to support children and youth's sense of belonging. Recall, these findings are relevant not just to WRPS but to a larger picture, as police services contribute to the WWR domain of Community Vitality.

## Next Steps

Ideally, the wider public sees themselves reflected in this community consultation with the overall themes resonating. Similar thoughts and thoughts that were expressed frequently will be grouped into themes, and these themes will be the basis of developing goals and objectives. The focus group results will be combined with other scanning pieces in the development of a plan. There was a strong appetite from the community to keep up these conversations and there were many offers to get further involved. The continuum of interaction flows from Outreach → Consultation → Coordination → to Collaboration. Thus, this community engagement exercise would indeed be enhanced with public and multi-sector involvement in problem-solving and even some ownership of the goals and objectives and performance indicators that make it into the Strategic Business Plan.



*Appendix A – Community Focus Group content*

Example questions to spark conversation (subject to change)

1. How can police better work with the \_\_\_\_\_ community?
  - a. Any ways to partner?
  - b. Any innovative ways to achieve change?
  - c. What would look or feel differently if we made this change?
2. What are the biggest safety concerns in the \_\_\_\_\_ community?
  - a. What would it take to create change on this issue?
3. What should police do more of?
4. What should police do less of?
5. What's working well that we should keep doing?
6. What are we missing?
7. What challenges do you think WRPS will need to address in the next 3 years?
8. What values should the WRPS display? (i.e. one word to describe the way they approach their work, a display of character that makes it into everything they do)

