

2021 Rocky Mountain House RCMP Community Engagement



In December of 2020, I published an invitation for local community members in the Rocky Mountain House RCMP Detachment area to submit comments and/or concerns about policing issues in the following geographic areas: Rocky Mountain House, Caroline, Leslieville, Nordegg, O'Chiese FN, Sunchild FN, Big Horn FN and Clearwater County. Normally, a Town Hall Meeting would have been held in a local community hall; however, due to the current state of the pandemic, this was not possible. I was pleased to receive 16 responses via email and 1 written response through traditional mail.

While there were some exceptions, I have to thank the majority of the people who responded for their expressions of support for the police and members of the Rocky Mountain House Detachment. While we always strive to do the best job we can, I am a realist and know that there will be occasions where we fall short of people's expectations. Inside each uniform here is a human being, fallible at times, just like every human being. That being said, if there is a shortcoming by the police identified, we will acknowledge it, then strive to rectify it and do better. Within the feedback received, there was some common themes, so I will break my responses down into those themes and in doing so, hopefully address the issues and concerns raised by everyone who responded.

Traffic Concerns: Several respondents identified motor vehicle traffic concerns in their correspondence, including concerns about speeding, loud exhausts, inadequate mud flaps & fenders for oversize tires and racing vehicles. The perceived lack of visible traffic enforcement was a cause for some concerns, as was the potential safety concerns these traffic issues could lead to. Traffic safety is one of the Detachment priorities in this year's annual performance plan and as such, it is expected that the members of the Detachment will make traffic enforcement part of their patrol activities, including random check stops throughout the Detachment area. It is important to mention that we must prioritize our work and response to criminal calls for service will be prioritized over traffic enforcement when necessary, so at those times when we are dealing with a high call volume, the amount of time that can be dedicated to proactive traffic enforcement is limited. It is also important to remind the public that we have very valuable partners in the Community Peace Officers employed by both the Town of Rocky Mountain House and Clearwater County. These professional peace officers are well trained and traffic enforcement falls within their mandates as well, so can be called on to address non-criminal traffic concerns and requests for patrols and presence in areas where driving behaviours are a concern. An

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important factor to consider with unsafe driving behaviour is that the infraction typically has to be observed occurring for police to take enforcement action. A ticket can be issued after the fact if a complainant provides a statement describing the driving and can identify both the vehicle, and preferably the driver, although tickets can be issued to the registered owners of vehicles when the driver's identity is unknown. As always, video is the best evidence to capture the offensive driving, but the public should never put themselves in harms way to obtain it.

Drug use and trafficking: Many respondents expressed concerns about the amount of illegal drug use and drug trafficking that is occurring within the Rocky Mountain House detachment area. We do recognize this as one of the biggest issues driving criminality in our area and is one of the main driving forces behind many other forms of crime that the public is subject to. While methamphetamine is the most common drug we are seeing in association to criminal behaviour and trafficking, we are also seeing increases in very dangerous drugs such as fentanyl and an increased presence of heroin. These street drugs are all highly addictive and those addictions often lead to people committing crime to fund the purchase of these drugs. Many of the vehicle thefts and property crimes that occur within our areas can be associated to criminals ultimately feeding these addictions. Combatting drug trafficking is another priority for the Detachment and over the past year we have seen several search warrants executed with large seizures of illicit drugs, cash and weapons seized as a result. The use and possession of firearms and other weapons by the criminals involved in drug trafficking in our area is an ongoing concern, for both police and public safety. The Detachment has members specifically dedicated to Crime Reduction activities that primarily focuses their attention on the known prolific and repeat offenders who reside in the Detachment area and who, not surprisingly, are the main players in the local drug trade. We encourage residents to continue to report suspected drug trafficking activities and residences where it may be occurring, as these investigations are complex and the cases take time to build. The expectation that reporting a residence as a drug trafficking location will result in an immediate stop to the activity is unrealistic. The law, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Courts set a very high bar for the police in obtaining reasonable and probable grounds to obtain search warrants for a private residence, so these investigations take up a lot of time and resources. I have yet to be posted to a Detachment where it is not common knowledge who the drug dealers are, but sadly, there is a huge difference between knowing who it is and being able to prove it and lay charges. We have a valuable partner in the Alberta SCAN (Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods) program, who have the ability to investigate these drug trafficking residences in conjunction with us and use provincial authorities to seize the properties themselves. We also need to recognize our partners in the field of addictions treatment, as there is always hope that if a person can beat the addiction, then they will avoid being caught up in the other criminal activity that often accompanies it. Alberta Health Services can offer information and services to those people, so if you know someone who needs the help, be it family or friend, try to assist them in getting that help. This is not an issue that will disappear quickly, but the members of Rocky Mountain House Detachment remain committed to combatting it as long as necessary.

Property Theft / Break and Enters: As I mentioned earlier, addictions, illicit drug use and drug trafficking all result in spin-off crimes, typically property crimes where the proceeds are used to support illegal drug, and now legal, drug use, as well as other addictions, such as alcohol. We see a definite trend in vehicles being stolen, and then used as transportation for criminals to commit other crimes, most often

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further thefts of property or break and enters. While we have seen a significant drop in break and enter and theft statistics over the past year, this may be related to how the pandemic has changed the face of society in that time. People are not travelling as they used to, going away on extended vacations, or in many cases, even going to work, now working from home or remaining home while their industry is shut down. This has made it much more difficult for roving criminals to commit crimes of opportunity on empty properties. The release of federal funding during the pandemic has also provided a source of income for those who may be otherwise inclined to be out looking for targets of theft or break and enter. At some point this trend may end, therefore it is important for people to look at how they secure their property and make it less attractive to would be thieves. The "Lock it or lose it" campaign has been running for several years now in Alberta and is a self-explanatory program, meaning lock up your vehicles and valuables, lest they become easy targets for theft. Lock up your vehicles when not in use and do not leave valuables in them, especially unsecured firearms. I realize this can be a chore, and in a perfect world unnecessary, but unfortunately, we live in an imperfect world. Thieves will not think twice about smashing out a vehicle window for a cup holder full of change, let alone to steal an idling vehicle. Do not lock up your vehicle, but leave a spare set of keys in the console or glove box, many a vehicle is stolen this way. Even if you lock your vehicle in a garage or Quonset, do not leave the keys in it, as we have seen thieves not hesitate to drive through garage doors to get away. Using hitch locks or wheel locks will make trailer theft difficult; these are often the targets of thieves, especially if they contain other valuable items such as off road vehicles or tools. This lock it or lose it principal applies to all your property, including your residence. Thieves are lazy by nature and the harder you make it for them to take something, the less inclined they will be to do so. For your property and residences, applying the principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a worthwhile exercise. There are many resources available on-line to assist with this, or you can call the detachment and one of our members trained in CPTED can attend your property and provide an assessment and recommendations to you. The main principles of CPTED are natural surveillance ensuring you have good lines of sight throughout your property, natural access control to your property via visible barriers, either man made or through landscaping, upkeep of maintenance of your property and adequate lighting and locks. This may mean investing in motion activated security lighting on your residences and outbuildings, as well as quality locks on every door, preferably deadbolts. Firearms security is a big concern for the RCMP as we see too many stolen firearms in the hands of the criminals we deal with. If you are a firearm owner, please take the steps to store your firearms securely, preferably a safe that is affixed to the floor and wall. Finally, we recover a lot of stolen property, but have no way of identifying the owner if they have not provided serial numbers or other distinctive markings to police for identification. Please take the time to document the serial numbers from any property your own that has one, these days as simple as walking around and taking a bunch of pictures with your cellphone. You may also wish to consider purchasing a Trace Pen from the Clearwater County Rural Crime Watch and mark your property with it, thereby making it easy to identify with the Trace Pen reader they have generously supplied to us. I know most folks around here look out for each other, so continue that, make note of suspicious vehicles, getting good descriptions and preferably licence plates if you can to assist in looking into it when you report it to us. I realize it is a natural reaction to want to protect one's property, but I must caution folks against confronting would be thieves. This could lead to physical altercations and you never know if someone is carrying weapons or not, and whether they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol that may make them aggressive and unpredictable. The best course of action is to secure yourself in your residence and immediately call 911. No property is worth risking your

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life over. Someone trying to steal your property is viewed in an entirely different light than having to defend yourself or family from the threat of physical harm from an attacker, so please exercise sound judgement in your decisions and actions.

General Comments / Concerns: Many of the respondents mentioned their concerns over how the Justice system is dealing with the offenders we lay criminal charges against as a result of our investigations. These are concerns we hear from citizens on a regular basis and while I empathize with these frustrations, the police have little to no control over what occurs in the Courts once our investigation is complete and disclosed to the Crown Attorney for prosecution. There are occasions where our investigations have not produced sufficient evidence to ensure a conviction on the charges laid. There are many occasions where the police determine that the investigations conducted have provided an officer with reasonable and probable grounds to believe an offence has been committed and an information laying out the specified charge is sworn, but that evidence may not meet the burden of proof demanded by the Courts. The prosecution of charges and decisions on whether or not there is a likelihood of conviction, or if there is a public interest in pursuing charges laid, is the responsibility of the Crown Prosecutor's office. The application of the law and the determination of appropriate sentences or other dispositions for charges laid is the responsibility of the Judges appointed to the Courts. Public concerns about how either of these roles function, or about decisions made at those levels, should be directed to Alberta Justice or your local Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Several folks commented on the need for more police officers at Rocky Mountain House Detachment. While I do not necessarily disagree, policing is an expensive service, and getting more complex all the time. There is an ever-increasing administrative burden in documenting investigations for police officers in today's world, as well as increasing demands for what is included in Court disclosure and other mandatory administrative tasks associated with file maintenance. All of these things take time away from a member's ability to stay on patrol in the communities we serve. Not all of these tasks need to be completed by uniformed police officers and if I had the ability to do so, I would increase the amount of administrative support staff we have over having more uniformed members. The cost to the public is lower for these positions and they become cost effective force multipliers by taking on these administrative tasks and freeing up the existing members to remain visible and on patrol, versus at a desk typing up mandatory administrative reports. Were this to happen, we would have enough members here to keep up with the existing workload. Rocky Mountain House Detachment polices a huge geographical area, from Caroline in the south to the Brazeau Dam in the north and just before Eckville to the east and to the Banff Park boundary to the west. Knowing this, we have to contend with the reality that there is a possibility that response time to calls for service may be delayed, depending on how far the members on duty have to travel, and we ask for the public's patience should this circumstance arise. We are also appreciative of having the Community Peace Officers for Clearwater County and the Town of Rocky Mountain House as enforcement partners and ensuring the public has a more consistent uniformed presence on patrol in our communities.

I received some correspondence that suggested there is a bias and racism in the policing being provided to our Indigenous communities in the Detachment area. I cannot comment on what may have occurred in the past, but I can guarantee that I will not tolerate this behaviour from any members who work at

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the Rocky Mountain House Detachment now. I have provided policing services to Indigenous communities throughout my entire service of over 25 years now, from isolated fly-in posts to bigger communities near larger urban centres in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and now Alberta. The Detachment has begun working with Elders and the Chief and Council of O'Chiese First Nation to strengthen relationships and begin a process to provide education to the Detachment members on local history, tradition and culture. These are important steps towards reconciliation and rebuilding positive relationships with Indigenous people and communities. It is hoped that this work will expand to include Sunchild and Bighorn First Nations as well. The Detachment will always strive to provide a professional and culturally appropriate policing service to the Indigenous communities we serve. Since arriving in Rocky Mountain House, I have noted a trend in the lack of cooperation with police investigations by people from some of the communities we serve. It is important for people to know that the police are only as effective as they are allowed to be at times. If witnesses and complainants are not willing to provide the police with the information and evidence they may have, then it ties our hands and there is little we can do to help. Crime rates in the Rocky Mountain House detachment area are higher than average and the community needs to be part of the solution to that. It has been my experience that there is often a direct correlation between how much crime occurs in a community and their tolerance of it by not cooperating with the police in combatting it. The practice I am observing of "see nothing, say nothing" allows the people committing the crimes free reign to continue their behaviour. I have heard the concept of not being a "rat" by talking to the police continuously throughout my career and it still mystifies me to this day. How is helping to protect your community and keeping it safe for everyone living there being a "rat"? I realize that stepping up and doing the right thing can take courage, but in all the communities I have ever worked in, the good people far outweigh the criminals causing the problems, and it is no different here. 5% of the population is usually responsible for 90% of the crime, so when communities pull together and work effectively with the police, the bad folks do not stand a chance.

Once again, I would like to thank all the folks that took the time to respond to my invitation and I hope that I have been able to answer your questions and concerns. I apologize for the delay in my response, I know it is a bit later than I had initially intended. I look forward to being able to conduct in person Town Hall meetings again soon and be able to continue this kind of dialogue with the public we proudly serve.

Sincerely,

S/Sgt. Carl Dinsdale

Detachment Commander

Rocky Mtn House RCMP Detachment

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