

Break-and-Enter, theft victims call for Police to step up reporting, patrols

‘Aurora is safe,’ members of York Regional Police told residents at Town Hall on Thursday evening at a Community Safety forum hosted by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy – but area residents who have fallen victim to crime said they did not feel safe.

The Community Safety Town Hall was held March 21 and was attended by the MPP, Mayor Tom Mrakas, members of Council, and several members of the York Regional Police (YRP) who call Aurora home.

For MPP Gallagher Murphy, it was a chance for members of the public to hear directly from those ‘who are tackling crime right here in Aurora and Newmarket’ and share safety initiatives, and for YRP Deputy Chief Paulo Da Silva the opportunity to share data and challenge residents on ‘what you have heard as opposed to what you know.’

‘Aurora is safe,’ said Da Silva. ‘We realize there is a lot of concern with what we see in the media and what we have heard or read, but I can’t stress enough that Aurora is safe.’

‘We want you (the public) to have the one source of truth [that] is actually the data that is presented here,’ he continued, following an introduction to the YRP’s Community Data Portal, which allows residents to go online and look at crime statistics in their communities, right down to the neighbourhood level.

This message was reiterated by YRP Detective Sergeant Sherwin Bachoo, who told residents he and his family moved from Brampton to Aurora for the safety this community offered.

‘We are all safe – that’s number one,’ said Bachoo. ‘I know everyone has been getting this information [from] the news, TV, TikTok, social media stuff, Instagram – you’re getting bad information. The real information is I live in the community and I am telling you it is safe.’

Trends related to break-and-enters and other forms of theft fluctuate throughout the year, he said, and as much as YRP patrols it is important for residents to ‘get to know your neighbours.’

‘They are the best crime prevention you can have,’ he said.

Assembled members of the YRP said these types of crimes are crimes of opportunity and it is important to ‘take that opportunity away’ from criminals and would-be criminals, including being diligent about lighting, installing doorbell cameras which can provide invaluable information to police not just for the homes they are installed but the surrounding community as well, and even Faraday bags, offered by the police, to protect your key fobs from being targeted.

‘Community safety is a shared responsibility,’ said Da Silva.

Community members, however, questioned just how accurate and up-to-date the information contained within the Community Data Portal was.

Stephanie McCleave, a resident of Aurora’s northwest quadrant, told Police a number of break-ins in this part of the community were not reflected on the portal.

‘Our numbers might seem small in comparison to what is going on elsewhere in the Region,’ she said, noting a series of break-ins from 2009, 2013, 2013, before ramping back up over the pandemic. ‘We want as a neighbourhood to get ahead of this before their experience becomes ours and that is the whole reason why we are bringing this up: we don’t want to be sitting here whinging that we should have done something sooner; we want to work with police, the neighbourhood and the community to try and make that

happen so we can get ahead of it. Once your house is broken into, your memories of your whole past in that home has become tarnished.?

This was a view supported by resident Penney Reynolds who said her house was broken into in November while she was at her cottage. She came home on a Friday afternoon to find all the doors wide-open, drapes pulled shut, pictures pulled off walls ? ?they really trashed it.?

?[My daughter] will not stay by herself in the house anymore, I don't blame her,? said Reynolds, who said she and her neighbours have been sharing information on the break-ins in their community. ?I see on your (YRP's) map some of them, but I don't see the one that was on Whispering Pine the week before Christmas, another one that was on Valley Crescent, Heathwood?

?The Police were very good about coming out, they wrote a report, the Constable said somebody would be checking the neighbourhood cameras; nobody ever checked because none of my neighbours has ever been approached? Forensics came in and said, ?I can't find any fingerprints in your house. I'm not that great a housekeeper ? I've got news for you, there are fingerprints that are there.

?Do I feel safe? I don't feel safe; I'm a victim.?

Reynolds said she would like to see more police patrols within Aurora and for YRP officers to take neighbourhood streets on shift changes, rather than busy thoroughfares like Yonge and Wellington, when on their rounds to add increased community presence in a way that wouldn't impact Police budgets or time.

?We could be a leader in crime prevention,? she concluded.

Measures suggested by McCleave included lights on local trail systems, for direct notification to residents when a crime occurs in their neighbourhoods, and potentially the use of drones for nighttime patrol.

Da Silva said he ?understood? that communities were feeling unsafe and stressed he was in no way trying to ?minimize? the impact crime has had on them.

?I want to reassure you that we hear you and we understand,? he said. ?If we know there are vulnerabilities there, then we can do certain things to make sure our officers are proactive in what they do.?

He encouraged everyone to keep an eye on their community in an ?informal? Neighbourhood Watch program.

?You don't need a formalized program; all you need are eyes and ears of the community to say, ?I know what is happening in my neighbourhood and I know that F150 shouldn't be there and I perhaps should pick up the phone [and make] the enquiry.?'?

He also said patrols like the ones cited by McCleave were always what the YRP was looking for.

?Don't take the main streets ? go through the neighbourhoods, that will make a big difference. I can tell you that is something we will take away and definitely enact. I hope the next time we meet, you can say that you actually saw a police officer not just once, but more than once.?

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter