

YRP notes community safety is a team effort

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Knowledge is power and accurate information can be invaluable in keeping communities safe. That was one of the messages delivered by York Regional Police officers during a community safety meeting Monday night, held in the municipal council chambers. A crowd of interested residents, along with almost 100 viewing online, heard officers explain the latest in data collection, technological tools and resources available to both the public and police officers, to help residents. There are many 'pieces to the puzzle' and it's a matter of 'people are the police, and the police are the people.' The meeting was organized in response to some violent home invasions in King and Mayor Steve Pellegrini noted public safety is council's number-one concern. 'We've heard you loud and clear,' he said. He added when the municipal centre was built, they made sure it contained an office for YRP personnel, to maintain a local presence. The YRP, he stressed, works for, and with citizens. The mayor, who also serves as vice-chair of the YRP services board, said the YRP budget will have its largest increase in funding in 2025 and that means more boots on the ground. But sheer numbers are limited by both budgets and the number of recruits. All police services are recruiting, but numbers are limited. The CCTV cameras are new technology, currently in their first year of operation. Mayor Pellegrini noted they are located in busy, high-crime areas, but King has managed to secure a couple of these units to keep an eye on things. Superintendent Maurice James said while three patrol units are dedicated to King, there are more officers and resources that people don't see. He assured residents they are being looked after. Regarding recent home invasions, these are not random incidents and average citizens are not at risk. The community is safe, officers stressed. YRP has a vast array of resources at their disposal to track, monitor and respond to occurrences. The YRP helicopter, Air2, took to the skies on its maiden flight in March of 2023. It plays a vital role in supporting officers responding to more than 1,000 calls for service each year. Members working in the Air Support Unit 'which also manages the deployment of remotely-piloted aircraft' played a hand in more than 260 arrests and assisted arrests in 2023. Data Analyst Greg Stanisci said the Community Safety Data Portal is a comprehensive tool the public can access to pinpoint everything from the types of occurrences and their locations, to time of day, crime trends and incidents on a day-to-day basis. The dashboard, he said, was built for public and officers to monitor and analyze data. Detailed maps and information tracks all incidents, locations and crime types, from assaults and stolen vehicles to impaired driving. Through the dashboard, residents can also track the status of incidents and even ongoing investigations. Residents can also fill out forms to something like Crime Stoppers, to provide information on local crimes. The dashboard, launched in 2022, also provides community safety alerts and even crime prevention videos. To check the stats in your community or neighbourhood, visit <https://community-safety-portal-datayrp.hub.arcgis.com/> Having the knowledge provided by the dashboard means different things to different people, Stanisci said. The point is to let people see the actual numbers for the best, most accurate resource. He did say traffic has been the number one concern expressed by the public over the years. Members of the public shared their personal experiences and concerns in some heated, emotional exchanges. Some have been victims of break-ins and car thefts. PC Riczard Wojtulewicz, Crime Prevention Officer, said a lot can be accomplished through a combined effort. 'We need your eyes and ears,' he said. The officer has investigated countless break-ins and he agreed they're much more than property crimes, and leave a lasting trauma on homeowners. In his presentation, he offered residents many tips and pieces of advice on making their homes stronger, and less attractive to thieves. There are many things homeowners can do to mitigate break-ins, including improving surveillance cameras, lighting, securing gates and more. He also noted that we can all help our neighbours, especially when they're away or on vacation. Clearing their driveways of snow, picking up newspapers, etc. can go a long way to deterring would-be criminals. Officers noted they are constantly reviewing the data to help them decide how to deploy their resources. Some residents expressed their dismay at a lack or delay of police response in King. They're doing the best they can with what they have. They listen, and gather valuable input through events like the community safety meeting. They understand people get frustrated with response times and individual incidents. Officers are available at the sub-station at the municipal centre during office hours. The portal also offers a tremendous amount of information for residents.