

# **STRATFORD POLICE SERVICE BOARD**

A meeting of the Stratford Police Service Board was held on the 10th day of December 2025 at 4:30 p.m., Stratford Rotary Complex – Mansbridge Rm., 353 McCarthy Road W., Stratford ON

**PRESENT:** Steve Cousins - Chair, Martin Ritsma, Harjinder Nijjar, Dan Mathieson, Chief Greg Skinner, Acting Deputy Chief Mark Taylor, Inspector Jason Clarke, André Morin – CAO, Constable Rachelle Willows, members of the public, members of the media, Casey Riehl – Executive Assistant

## **MINUTES**

### **1. Call to order**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:30 p.m.

### **2. Reading of the Land Acknowledgement**

### **3. Affirmation of New Provincial Appointee**

New member, Dan Mathieson, read and signed the Ontario Regulation 416/23: Oaths and Affirmations under the Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019 (CSPA)

### **4. Adoption of the December 10, 2025 Agenda and Addition of Agenda Items**

**Motion by** Martin Ritsma | Harjinder Nijjar

**THAT the agenda for the regular meeting of December 10, 2025, be adopted as presented.**

**Carried**

### **5. Declarations of Pecuniary Interest and the General Nature Thereof**

None declared.

### **6. Adoption of the Minutes from the Regular Meeting on October 22, 2025.**

**Motion by** Harjinder Nijjar | Martin Ritsma

**THAT the minutes of the regular meeting of October 22, 2025, be adopted as printed.**

**Carried**

## **7. Business Arising from Previous Minutes**

### **7.1 Police Station Update**

Inspector Clarke reported that the roof work is now complete at 17 George Street. Scaffolding has all be dismantled by the company, however they have left a number of steel supports on the top floor holding the roof up in the court area. The city is working to replace all the plumbing fixtures at 17 George Street by the end of the year.

A consultant and Facilities Division staff are doing a building assessment of 17 George Street next Friday. They will be looking at the building from top to bottom.

There is a new CPIC position and office being installed in the dispatch centre and is close to being completed for the start date of January 1, 2026.

The new walls have been installed at 789 Erie Street at the end of the Criminal Investigation Division. It is now housed in one secure area.

### **7.2 Update on Grant Funding**

Chief Skinner updated members that they have received the latest round of the NG-911 funding. Inspector Clarke worked on a mental health grant that Stratford was also successful in receiving, as well as the continuation of the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCERT) grant in the amount of \$120,000.00 over the next two years. The SPS is actively working with the HPHA and the detachments in Huron and Perth Counties to collaboratively continue with that program and provide coverage for the three policing jurisdictions.

## **8. Presentations/Delegations**

None noted.

## **9. Correspondence Received**

### **9.1 OACP's Continued Advocacy on Ensuring Equitable and Sustainable Police Funding in Ontario**

Chief Skinner reviewed the letter from the OACP president about ensuring that there is equitable and sustainable police funding in Ontario. This has been an ongoing topic of discussion with the Board and Stratford Council around the \$77,000,000.00 that was provided by the provincial government to municipalities that were receiving policing services from the OPP. The 42 municipal police services in Ontario were not allotted any additional funding from the government. Part of the stipulation of that funding was to offset increased compensation costs as a result of the collective bargaining agreements and it capped at 11% annually. The funding increase for the SPS for 2026 is approximately 5.7% and that 11% would have significantly

reduced that number if there was a fair and equitable funding provided to all the municipalities and not just the OPP policed municipalities.

## **9.2 Bail Reform Letter – Chiefs of Police**

Chief Skinner reviewed the letter from Frank Campion, Mayor of Welland, Ontario regarding the National Sex Offender Registry, the safety of children who could become victims of violent sexual crimes and also the current bail reform issues that are being experienced in Ontario and here in Stratford. The purpose of this letter is to garner the support of Chief's to continue to pressure the government to look at bail reform initiatives and ensuring that those that are charged and sentenced are serving their sentences appropriately.

# **10. Chairs Report**

## **10.1 Strategic Plan Initiative**

Steve Cousins reported that the strategic plan initiative is launching within the next week. This will provide the Board with a plan and a vision to move forward successfully, have senior leadership that understands what the plan is and can execute it, have strong organizational development to build a team who can get the job done and it needs to be measured.

Mr. Cousins noted that it is critical that the Board is aligned with the community. The Board and the Stratford Police Service are committed to maintaining a municipal police force. As Inspector Clarke previously stated, they will work towards being the best medium-sized police force that has the best community or customer experience in Canada. There needs to be clear direction given to the police to allow them to operate, with accountability. That is where the metrification comes in.

The Board is required to be in compliance with the Community Safety in Policing Act with a strategic plan and has hired Consilium Consulting to help complete a plan. The Board feels that they are the best fit for Stratford. They have worked with Police Service Boards in Thunder Bay, Brantford, St. Thomas, Peterborough, Timmins and Brockville. All similar medium-sized communities to Stratford. Consilium brings a diversified team, many are former police members and some are also business professionals with municipal experience.

The strategic plan will initially be launched by e-mailing letters to stakeholders, such as the SPS members and one for the community at large. In January, a link will be shared with all stakeholders for them to complete an online survey. Consilium will also be meeting in person with stakeholders, the Chief, the Acting Deputy Chief, Inspectors, NCO's and the

Police Association either one-on-one or in small groups. Stakeholders from St. Marys and Perth South will also be included. Everyone's voice needs to be heard to gather the feedback needed. Thematically, and on average, we will find out exactly what the community wants. There will be a public survey also launched later in January. The goal is to have a presentation to the Board in April to talk about their findings and hear what they are proposing. There will be a public session planned with the community later in April or May.

## **11. Governance Report**

### **11.1 SPSB Oversight & Accountability Metrics**

Steve Cousins discussed, in conjunction with the strategic plan, the importance of having oversight and accountability metrics that align with Ontario's CSPA. Mr. Cousins thanked the Inspectors for their recent changes in reporting to reflect this. The statistics tend to be trailing indicators and there needs to be more leading indicators reporting. Mr. Cousins has done some research and benchmarking through the OAPSB and other organizations and created (8) categories:

- Adequate and Effective Policing (CSPA Core Requirement)
- Crime Prevention and Public Safety
- Community Trust, Transparency and Legitimacy
- Professional Standards, Use of Force and Duty of Care
- Assistance to Victims and Vulnerable Persons
- Traffic Safety and Public Order Maintenance
- Organizational Health, Training and Resource Stewardship
- Financial Stewardship and Strategic Alignment

Mr. Cousins suggested that some of the points could be worked on right away and perhaps a task force made up of police members and Board members or the Chief could set up a small team to initially begin the work. This is not mandated; it is a talking piece to measure certain items and get the work done.

## **12. Receipt of Monthly Statistical Reports (October/November 2025)**

### **12.1 Statistical Reports for Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South (October/November 2025)**

Board Members have been provided the October and November 2025 statistical reports for Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South.

Acting Deputy Chief Taylor reported that the recent statistical reports maintain stable trends for calls for service and crime response, with no

significant spikes compared to previous months. Year to date analysis reveals targeted increases in specific categories.

- Frauds have risen slightly from 277 in 2024 to 279 as of November 2025
- Thefts under \$5,000 show a more notable increase, from 299 in 2024 to 328 through November 2025.
- Charges laid in, both criminal and provincial offences in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth South, have grown from 5,936 in 2024 to 6,114 to date in 2025
- Youth charges continue to decline and are to date below 2024 levels
- Most other occurrence types are trending downwards
- Mental health related calls remain high overall, with a slight decrease projected in Stratford, a small increase in both St. Marys and Perth South
- Two robberies occurred in November and officers have been tasked with increasing their visibility in the downtown core, the Stratford malls and other high traffic areas to enhance community safety
- Although the overall activity remains consistent, increases in property crime and fraud warrant continued monitoring, resource planning and investigation. Mental health calls are made a priority for service to the community

Monthly Disposition Report:

- Clearance rates for year to date: 5,736 charges laid. Of those charges, 1,097 convictions, 36 of which have been diverted, non-convictions are 4,603.
- Year over year, the SPS conviction rate has increased. The lowest rate was in 2021 with a conviction rate of 18.2% and non-convictions at 81.8%. In 2024, calls for service were high and there were 6,198 charges laid and convicted on 24.3%.
- The number of non-convictions seems high. The Acting Deputy Chief and Inspector Clarke met with the Crown last week to review the non-convictions. There is no issue whatsoever with officers disclosure to the Crown or the materials that they are submitting for the convictions. The most significant reason that charges are being dropped is the simple possession charges are being withdrawn by the Crown. SPS as a service will continue to lay all possession charges out of concerns for safety.

**MOTION by** Martin Ritsma | Harjinder Nijjar

**That the monthly statistical reports for October and November 2025 be approved as presented.**

**Carried**

### **13. Chief's Report**

#### **13.1 Financial Reports (October/November 2025)**

Board members received the October and November 2025 financial report. Chief Skinner reported on the figures as of November 30, 2025.

On average the SPS is spending slightly more than \$1,000,000.00 per month, at the end of November they would expect to have spent 91.7% of the annual budget. Some line items are over the 91.7% expenditure expectation and some are under. Overall, the SPS has spent 78.5% of the total budget, which put the service in a positive budget variance position. Overtime payouts occur in December, so the expectation is that the payroll premiums line will increase to show the financial impact of that payout. Salaries and benefits account for approximately 88% of the total annual budget, it stands to reason that most of the positive variance to date comes from the salary lines. Any savings that have occurred in salaries can be contributed to gapping vacancies, long-term absences and replacing more senior officers with new recruits. Staffing to minimum staffing level, calling in members on overtime is a significant contributor to the high overtime costs. Recent hires and members returning to work from longtime absences should decrease the overtime expenditure over the next calendar year.

From a year-to-date perspective, the annual expenditure will be less than the budget allocation, putting the SPS in a positive variance position for the year.

**MOTION by** Harjinder Nijjar | Martin Ritsma

**That the monthly accounts as of November 30, 2025, be approved as presented. Carried**

#### **13.2 Public Complaints**

Chief Skinner reported that there have been (4) new public complaints received. (1) Complaint was withdrawn by the complainant, the remaining (3) were deemed to be not in the public interest to refer to investigation by the Law Enforcement Complaints Agency (LECA). None of the (4) complaints met the level of investigation required and have all been closed.

## **14. New Business**

### **14.1 Introducing Newly Hired Members of the Service at Board Meetings**

Chief Skinner stated that they would like to start inviting recently hired members of the Service to attend Board meetings for introduction to the Board. There is currently a class of four new recruits that will be graduating next week and would like to invite them to the January Board meeting to be welcomed to the City and also welcomed by the Board. Steve Cousins agreed that this would be a good opportunity to meet and welcome new recruits, as well as special constables.

### **14.2 Approval of Application for Appointment for Special Constable**

Chief Skinner reported that the new Community in Safety Policing Act requires the Board to now approve the appointment of all special constables. Benjamin vonEuw is now a member of the Stratford Police Service as a special constable and his application for appointment was previously circulated to Board members for their review.

**Motion by** Martin Ritsma | Harjinder Nijjar

**THAT the Stratford Police Service Board approves the appointment of Special Constable Benjamin vonEuw.**

**Carried**

### **14.3 Approval of the 2026 OAPSB Registration Fees**

**Motion by** Martin Ritsma | Harjinder Nijjar

**THAT the Stratford Police Service Board approves the payment of \$5,436.70 for the 2026 Ontario Association of Police Service Boards registration fee.**

**Carried**

### **14.4 Approval of City of Stratford 2026 Budget**

Martin Ritsma thanked Acting Deputy Chief Mark Taylor for all his work on the SPS 2026 budget. The Acting Deputy Chief and Chief Skinner did a fantastic job of presenting the budget to City Council with an increase of 5.2%. It was well-received by Council and was part of the overall City budget of 3.19%.

## **14.5 Stratford Festival Marketplace Mall Discussion**

Martin Ritsma recently met with one of the owners of Festival Marketplace Mall and the concerns around the recent smash and grab robberies at the jewelry store location. There is now a good plan moving forward regarding their challenges and they will reconvene in a month to see if any of the plans implemented have had an impact.

Chief Skinner stated that it is one thing to have your store smashed and your jewelry stolen, it is a whole other issue with the trauma that is left with the people who were there and experienced the robbery. It has a huge impact on people mentally and physically.

The SPS has received calls from the public voicing their concerns about their safety shopping at the mall. Chief Skinner stated that the SPS is having a greater presence at the mall. Officer Rachelle Willow's unit has been attending the mall providing a greater sense of safety with uniformed police officers in and around the area. If anything were to happen, there would be an immediate response and safety would be taken care of. Unfortunately, the police cannot be there all of the time and need to discuss proactive, preventative measures that they can put in place to support the mall broadly, the clients of the mall and specifically the jewelry store in particular. There is a large organized crime group in Southwestern Ontario doing these types of robberies and there have been some arrests. Project Wrangler has arrested (13) individuals in relation to some of the other jewelry store robberies. One of the robberies at the Stratford location has been solved.

## **14.6 Recognition of Dedication and Bravery**

Acting Deputy Chief Taylor reported that after the August 1, 2024 crisis that occurred on Bradshaw Drive with calls being received of gunshot victims and an active shooter. In that moment of uncertainty and danger, six SPS officers acted without hesitation. They rushed towards the threat and acted with courage and professionalism. Their decisive actions and lifesaving measures that evening not only protected lives but exemplified a very high standard of policing. These officers demonstrated what it truly means to serve and protect. In recognition of their extraordinary bravery, the SPS applied for the Ontario Medal for Police Bravery. While they were informed in 2025 that their application was not successful, that does not diminish the

heroism and display of bravery that night in August. Their actions will forever stand as a testament to their commitment to their community.

On behalf of the Stratford Police Service and the citizens they serve, Acting Deputy Chief Taylor expresses his deepest gratitude to the officers and thank them for their dedication, courage and unwavering resolve to keep our community safe.

- Constable Jeff Serf
- Constable Brady Simpson
- Constable Brent Poppe
- Constable Scott Parkinson
- Constable Amy Knechtel
- Constable Nick Feltz

#### **14.7 Update on Derek Ritz Reward**

Acting Deputy Chief Taylor reported that he and Inspector Clarke met with friends of Derek Ritz with regards to offering a reward. The stipulation is that there will be no reward issued unless there is a conviction. The information on the \$10,000.00 reward will be released in January.

#### **15. Consent Items**

None noted.

#### **16. Adjournment to In-Camera Meeting**

**Motion by** Martin Ritsma | Harjinder Nijjar

**THAT the meeting adjourn to an In-Camera session to discuss personal matters about identifiable individuals and property, to reconvene in open session if required.**

**Carried**

The meeting adjourned to In-Camera at 5:21 p.m.

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Steve Cousins, Chair