



Taber Police Service

Analysis of
Focus Group Discussions
Conducted The Weeks Of
September 21 and 28, 2020

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Overview:

The Taber Police Service business planning cycle is governed by the needs of the organization as well as the policing standards of the Province of Alberta. One of the rudimentary principals of business planning is to collect data from the community to identify community needs and expectations as they refer to policing services. The purpose of which is to create a strategic plan to focus on what is important, and be assessed on our ability to achieve the goals that emerge from this community consultation.

Since 1999 the Taber Police Service has conducted 6 business planning cycles which have included: a) crime analyses, b) community surveys, c) public document analyses, and finally, (d) the purpose of this report, focus group results.

Focus groups are an excellent method of soliciting information from a group of people, in a more relaxed atmosphere, whereby a discussion emerges that can introduce issues of concerns that may not be found within individual interviews. Focus groups are a way to gain consensus from community stakeholders and allows for the focused analyses of a research question. For the purpose of this research, the Taber Police Service decided to host four separate focus groups. The Town of Taber Council and the Taber Municipal Police Commission each participated in their own focus group in the week of September 21. In The week of September 28, 2020, two more focus groups were held. The first was a group of approximately 14 people from different professional and service organizations within the community. These are the partners that we work with daily and whom, in many cases, our service deliveries coincide. Invites were sent out to the partners for their participation and the candidates were selected by the organizations themselves. The fourth group was focused on community members and invites were sent out to associations and individuals that represent certain demographics, cultures and groups within our community, including the Filipino Society, the Low German Speaking Mennonite community, First Nations Metis and Inuit, and the LGBTQ2+ community. Our goal was to reach out to groups of diversity to bring in the widest selection of perspectives that we could find. The focus groups were approximately 1.5 hours in length and about 44 people were engaged within the 4 focus groups.

A basic S.W.O.T. analyses was deployed as the method to commence the line of questioning posed to the participants. The participants were asked to assess and discuss the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that the community of Taber will face in relation to policing services. At the end of the focus group, the participants were asked to vote on each of the concepts or issues raised as a means of consensus building and to demonstrate which areas are of most concern or priority to the participants.

The information gleaned from both days will be synthesized in the final analyses in this report. However, to commence this discussion, a breakdown of the results from each session will be described. Where able, the themes identified within the analyses were synthesized so to avoid duplication. The asterisk at the beginning of the line indicates the votes that item received.

STRENGTHS

- ***** Excellent SRO program
- ***** Have own local police service/local dispatch who knows the area
- ***** Totally committed to community/community involvement
 - ***** Members are invested/live in the community/All members approachable/personal
 - ***** Financially sound/fiscal management/diversified funding/properly resourced
 - **** Leadership/best led police force
 - *** Representing cultures/culture representation of staff
 - *** Supportive Council/Commission/Community
 - ** Integrity
 - ** Visibility
 - * Common sense policing
 - * Experience is worth something
 - * Youth focus – SRP, P.A.R.T.Y., camps, SPARK
 - * TPS personnel
 - * Safe community
 - * Governance
 - * Well trained/current on training (issue trends)

Mentioned Once:

- Small Town
- Roles identified
- Admin support from the Town
- Prosperous community
- Low crime rate
- Consistency in policing
- Not the American system
- Mature police force, we retain good people
- 24/7/365
- Familiarity with officers
- Safe policing environment
- See a file from start to finish
- Reputation of police service
- Community knows the members
- Social media – community communication
- Community support in action
- Relationships
- Committee work
- There is a core nucleus
- Social media shows individual involvement
- “Not wallowing in gall of bitterness”
- “Police clients” know police care
- Hospitality
- Positive experiences with dispatch

- PRC Service/references
- Collaborative
- Take pride in their work
- Compassionate/aware
- Wide experience(s) of staff; different backgrounds
- Community police force
- Work well with RCMP and other police/law enforcement agencies
- Try to deal with community members with respect and compassion
- TCAD / TCAPS
- Knowledge of who is in the community
- Community supports local police
- Consistency
- Have a hand-on approach to collaborating with different groups/organizations
- Ratio of officer per capita is under

WEAKNESSES

- **** Budget/Limited budget and resources
- *** Lacking indigenous, LGM Filipino representation/Police service may not reflect the community
- *** Programming for youth (summer especially)
- ** Succession planning
- ** High salaries
- * Community awareness re: collaboration with RCMP
- * Keeping up with technology

Mentioned Once:

- Distrust of police in other community may spread
- Small police force
- Able to retire early
- Familiarity with the public
- More community profiling of other engagements other than just SRP; music, committee work, sports, annual reports, etc.
- Is there a potential for the community to perceive an imbalance between community support and the “traditional” function of law enforcement?
- Perception that there could be officer bias?
- Training for forensic interviewing (children services)
- Support(s) mental health for staff?
- Organizations unsure how to approach them for representation at event at/and meetings (e.g., 4-H, Eagle Spirit Nest)
- Communication – how to?
- No other community forces to partner/train/etc.
- Big city issues (drugs, guns, vehicle theft) – lack resources?
- Complacency
- Resource Officer responsible for large population
- Scheduling with limited personnel (i.e., vacation, training)
- New ideas
- Staying open to what’s going on in the world (rat injustice)
- Can they be doing more to inform community what they are and not doing

OPPORTUNITIES

- ***** Have staff that speaks languages represented in the local cultures, educate on culture
- ***** Enhance mental health education
- ***** Cultural awareness
 - **** MD expansion-regional policing/MD cooperation/partnerships
 - **** Better communication about what police do
 - *** Ability to respond to the community because they are a part of the community; trust
 - **** Collaboration/relationship/info sharing
 - ** Use social media or mass communication in crime prevention/build social media presence
 - * Marketing of the police service
 - * Different recruiting schemes
 - * Balanced work force
 - * Work life balance in policing is a selling point for potential employees

Mentioned Once:

- Community policing assists with community engagement
- Community policing minimizes liability
- Taber could be a leader in the Alberta Police model
- Economies of scale, look for those
- Be more efficient with technology
- School involvement
 - Presentation
 - Relationship building; staff, students, parents
 - Continuing the positive relationship with community (i.e., education, domestic violence)
- Advertising the role of the SRO; creates normalcy
- Social media involvement
- Enhance community building
- Little Cops Camping
- Good community information
- Visibility in general community
- Accessibility
- Positive social media presence
- Social justice movements
- Having an awareness for needs
- Quicker response times
- Greater preventative measures and opportunity for community education
- Collaboration within different community organizations
- Provision and acceptance of feedback
- Support with training until another service can take over
- Assist people with learning disabilities

THREATS

- ***** Substance use – legal vs illegal/increased drug use/crime/opioid crisis
- ***** Funding – Provincial funding cuts/resources -Funding for SRO/training
 - ***** Cultural mistrust
 - *** Police defunding movement; protests
 - *** Vaping (drug use)
 - *** Domestic violence
 - ** Negative media/publicity
 - ** Expectations to wear many hats (i.e., paramedic, counsellor, peace maker, etc.) with less
 - * Tech-can we keep up
 - * Background/past experience/optics of police involvement

Mentioned Once:

- Last town police, any push away from this?
- Always in the public eye
- Pandemic, what does that bring
- Experience costs money
- Liability
- Public video and social media can be a threat
- Officer held to high standards
- Defund the police movements
- The Woke
- Shift work
- Old boys club of policing
- Poverty
- Skate park
- Migration of people needing extra help – most have challenges
- Collaboration – as more responsibility is placed on policing
- Less awareness of needs
- Threat of removing small town police to a provincial model
- Lack of cultural awareness
- Limitations to sharing of information
- Limitation on feedback because of provincially mandated restrictions

Discussion:

It was clear from the focus groups that as a means of collecting data from the community, the research method worked. In each focus group, the conversation was lively, self-directed from the participants and the conversations that took place resulted in a number of topical discussion points.

As a means of analysis, a thematic review of the points raised during the focus groups was conducted. Weight was given to the points raised that were given priority from the participants, although all points were considered.

It is clear from the participants that having their own local police service in which the police officers are integral parts of the community was important. Knowing that the police officers are invested in the community in which they police, live within community, and know the community and the people they interact with, was seen as a strength of the Taber Police Service. Although strengths were identified that we have some diversity within the Taber Police Service, it was determined that opportunities exist to bolster more diversity within the police service. The community would like the Taber Police Service to better reflect the demographics that exist now in Taber. These include the Filipino and LGM communities. It was considered an opportunity to have persons employed with the police service who can speak the languages reflected within our community, and have more cultural awareness of Taber's diversity. The participants believed that having more diversity and cultural awareness reflective of community will build trust, assist in crime prevention, and help investigations where language and cultural issues are barriers or challenges.

The School Resource Officer program was identified once again as our flagship community-policing program and was identified as a priority within each of the focus group sessions. There was a call to bolster the program believing that one officer is not sufficient to undertake this important role. The partnership between the school divisions and the Town of Taber and the Taber Police Service was seen as an excellent example to be fiscally responsible.

Funding and the costs of policing were identified as possible threats, however, the groups recognized that we have diverse funding streams, that the community, governance and Council support are strong and that they recognize the services that are being gained through the expenditures. It was suggested that the police service better communicate to the public exactly what it is they do. This would assist the community in better understanding where their tax dollars are being spent in policing. Furthermore, that the Police Service should undertake discussions with regional governments to see how we can better regionalize our services, find economies of scale, and partner more efficiently.

Communicating what we do, and using social media and other forms of communication to inform the public of our efforts was considered a priority for the groups. On the other hand, communication takes time and an investment of technology that comes with it is an expense. The challenges associated with these suggestions were also identified.

The movement occurring in North America around defund the police was addressed by the group. Most participants acknowledged the issue, but recognized that within our community those ideologies have little traction. In addition, that it is unlikely that they will if the Taber Police Services continues to provide service delivery as they currently provide.

From a crime perspective, the use and abuse of illegal and legal substances was identified by the group as the primary concern. The participants supported more youth programming around resiliency and mental health as a means of possibly assisting in this regard. The groups also recognized that the police are sometimes being asked to do too much in the community, and that others need to also engage in the support of our youth.

Conclusion:

To sum up this report, the Taber Police Service received support from the participants in the way we police in this community. We were asked to continue to build upon this strength and be exemplars of community policing. We were asked to increase our cultural awareness and bring people into our organization that reflect the demographics and cultures present in our community. We were asked to examine regional initiatives and partnerships to find economy of scale, and continue to focus on substance abuse and the criminality associated with addictions. To do this, we were asked to engage more with youth, enhance our SRO program and support other community organizations who assist in this regard. We were asked to communicate in different ways with community, increasing our social media presence, for example, as a means to inform the community of our efforts.

We would like to thank those who contributed to the success of these focus groups, and we commit to utilizing this data in our ongoing discussions within our internal strategic planning sessions within the Taber Police Service.