

# Police funding gaining support

## More aldermen may oppose cuts

BY JASON MARKUSOFF, CALGARY HERALD JULY 17, 2010



Constables Jim Gaetz, left, and Dan Atchison walk their beat on 17th Avenue SW. The officers were part of the new 66 member CPS downtown beat patrol officers now on the job. (Ted Rhodes/Calgary Herald)

**Photograph by:** Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald

The stage is set for a dramatic vote at city council Monday, with two aldermen now wavering on their previous positions against safeguarding Calgary police from city budget cuts where three are needed to reverse the decision.

An 8-7 vote last week was a rare one that went against the wishes of both police Chief Rick Hanson and Mayor Dave Bronconnier. They wanted to pre-approve the police budget and insulate it from the \$60 million in cuts that city departments must make to fend off an illegal deficit or higher tax hikes.

Police boosters have pressed hard -- uncomfortably hard, for some aldermen -- to change minds ever since, ahead of a second-chance motion coming to council Monday. It needs 10 votes, rather than a simple majority of eight.

And some of those efforts appear to be paying off.

After becoming the second member to heed Hanson's argument that provincial funding could be

imperilled if the police budget cuts too many officers, Ald. Bob Hawkesworth has launched a compromise motion of his own.

But trying to ensure the police service isn't immune from finding savings, Hawkesworth will urge council Monday to pre-approve enough funding to preserve officers, but also force police brass to come up with cuts to its support services.

"It's unlikely to me that council in November would make those kinds of (frontline) cuts anyway," Hawkesworth said.

Hawkesworth joins Ald. Linda Fox-Mellway, who has also signalled she's worried about a reduction in the number of officers on the street, potentially giving Bronconnier's side nine votes of the 10 it needs.

"But I still believe it's important that the police commission still go through the discipline we're asking every department to go through, and that's making administrative efficiencies and priorities."

But members on either side aren't swayed.

"He talks about people instead of money. Well, people equal money," said Ald. Gord Lowe, who led the push against Bronconnier's budget stance.

Lowe said by backing Hawkesworth's idea ahead of November budget debates, "you've spent the money and you've tied the hands of the next council. And, I'm sorry, I cannot support that."

Police commissioner Ald. John Mar, meanwhile, argues council can't go halfway.

"We put the guys out there, but we don't give them fuel for their car? That doesn't make sense," he said.

"They don't have equipment they need? That doesn't make sense either."

More than 80 per cent of the police budget goes toward salaries, including the one-quarter of its staff that are civilians.

Many sworn officers also work in support services, not the front lines.

Ald. Andre Chabot, who doesn't side with Mar and Hanson, is bringing his own proposal Monday: to tap the city's reserve fund to offset any police cuts. That idea, too, has many critics.

The debate has at times gotten personal, with Lowe and Ald. Joe Ceci both complaining they've been depicted as anti-police.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, a staunch police supporter, took aim at Ald. Jim Stevenson this week.

She complained to reporters that he's opposing safeguarding the police budget "and then still wanting money for the airport tunnel. And you know why that's different when it's next year's budget really escapes me."

Stevenson said the efforts to persuade him and predict a provincial crackdown on the city haven't worked on him.

"There's no way we should be making a decision based on speculation," he said.

"I think we were elected to make decisions on facts and we do not have the facts right now.

[jmarkusoff@theherald.canwest.com](mailto:jmarkusoff@theherald.canwest.com)

© Copyright (c) The Calgary Herald