

# City fears province will cut policing

## Downturn forces fresh look at finances

BY SHERRI ZICKEFOOSE AND KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD    SEPTEMBER 29, 2009



Alberta justice minister Alison Redford.

**Photograph by:** Grant Black/Canwest News Service,

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CALGARY - Aldermen are urging the provincial government to keep police funding off the chopping block during upcoming budget discussions.

Amid reports Solicitor General Fred Lindsay is reexamining budgets for policing, Calgary's mayor says this is no time for funding cuts, despite a tough economy.

"There's no question that funding crunches always mean looking at your priorities," Mayor Dave Bronconnier said. "But I can't think of a higher priority than public safety."

Bronconnier, who spent some months last year encouraging the province to increase its funding for additional police, said boosting the number of officers downtown has already shown an impact, decreasing crime by as much as 50 per cent.

"Now is not the time to consider redirecting funding for front-line officers," he said.

The Stelmach government last year promised to add another 300 officers across the province. The City

of Calgary has received funding for 82 officers and was counting on another 41 in the future.

Justice Minister Alison Redford says budgets are getting a review, but she has no reason to believe police funding will be pulled.

"We're going through some very serious and specific budget deliberations. From the perspective of my department, we haven't been given clear direction yet as to how significant our cuts will need to be," Redford told reporters following a joint address with police Chief Rick Hanson at a Calgary Chamber of Commerce luncheon Monday.

"Every government department is going through this process right now. It's a fairly rigorous process. . . . We're very concerned about making sure that in the next couple of years, we're making the right decisions that will allow us to come out of this economic downturn in good shape."

Redford added the safe communities program has made "tremendous strides" and it's important to the premier.

"I'm very confident we'll be able to continue to be able to build on that program."

Hanson said he's hopeful the three-year policing plan will continue and Calgary will receive a third instalment of 41 officers.

Without that money, it would mean fewer officers on the street, he said.

"Obviously, we'll have to look at our plan and see where the impact would be," the chief said. "It's too early to say. Right now, I'm still optimistic that they'll still continue that support."

"It's very important to continue with the plan, to continue to finish off with the extra police officer bodies that were spoken about two years ago."

"The urgency, the need's still there."

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, a member of the Calgary police commission, said she doesn't want to see any funding cuts.

"We need more police officers, not less," she said.

On top of the agreement that has seen Calgary receive funding for 41 new officers over the past two years, at a rate of \$100,000 for each position, the city also gets a grant of \$16 per capita for police operations.

That agreement, in effect until 2012, paid the city \$16.9 million for 2009-2010.

Extra officers launched in the downtown core last May have had a significant effect on crime, police say.

During the months of June and July, beat officers laid 134 Criminal Code charges, executed 1,223 warrants and submitted 1,670 checkups.

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