

Crime and Safety Public Forum Summary Report

To: New Westminster City Council + New Westminster Police Board

From: Coun. Daniel Fontaine + Coun. Paul Minhas

cc: Lisa LeBlanc, A/CAO + Dave Jensen, Chief of Police

Date: December 15, 2023

Re: Crime and Safety Public Forum – November

SUMMARY

On November 8th, 2023 Councillors Paul Minhas and Daniel Fontaine hosted a special townhall forum focusing on the topic of crime and safety in New Westminster.

The event took place from 7-9 pm at the Inn at the Quay and was attended by approximately 130 residents and business owners from across the city. Attendees registered on a first-come first-served basis with the event pre-registering a capacity crowd. The townhall forum was promoted via the [City of New Westminster calendar](#) and through local media and various social media platforms.

A subject-matter expert panel was invited to speak. Members of this panel included:

- **Dave Jones** - former Chief of Police for New Westminster and TransLink
- **Kash Heed** -former BC Solicitor General and Chief of Police for West Vancouver. Mr. Heed is currently a city councillor in Richmond, B.C.
- **Shirley Heafey** - former chair of the Commission for Public Complaints against the RCMP from 1996 to 2006 and was a member of the New Westminster police board from May 2021 until May 2023.

Each of the guest panelists were provided with the opportunity to provide opening remarks before Coun. Fontaine and Minhas posed a series of questions to them for response. The audience was also invited to ask questions during the Q&A session.

All members of City Council were invited to attend, but none chose to attend the townhall forum. School Trustee **Danielle Connelly** and Trustee by-election candidate **Kathleen Carlsen** did attend. No other members of the New West School Board were present.

TOPICS & DISCUSSION

Some of the topics discussed and comments made included:

- The important need for tiered policing in New Westminster. This has already been successfully implemented at the TransLink police with both the union and management in support of this initiative. This offers an opportunity to lower costs, free up valuable police resources to do more complex work and offers a great recruitment tool for the NWPD.
- A resident noted there are many unreported crimes within the city and the statistics we see may not reflect the reality of what is happening on the streets of New Westminster.
- *"We just can't default everything to the police...we have got to look at different ways of doing things, different ways of creating the safer environment for you, whether it's actual crime, or the perception of crime or fear of crime, which is more harmful than some of the crimes that are committed by themselves."*
Kash Heed - The Record Newspaper
- It was noted that 'not everything that makes you feel unsafe' is actually a crime.
- Police are very hard working, but often their processes, procedures and policies can be stuck and rooted in the past. The world has changed a lot in the last 15 years.
- Policing can constitute up to 30% of a civic budget and as such, elected officials at city hall need to pay close attention to what is going on with the NWPD. Every effort should be made to collaborate with the NW Police Board and find ways of lowering costs, while ensuring the police are not exposed to direct political interference in the day-to-day operations.
- A review of policing costs over the last decade would show that costs continue to escalate.
- The police are often the first line of public service responders when it comes to dealing with individuals living on the street or diagnosed with a mental illness.
- It was surprising to Mr. Heed that New Westminster chose to vote against establishing a *Crime and Safety Committee* - as he sees this as an issue local councils should be dealing with. He encouraged participants to hold local elected officials accountable for the level of crime and lack of public safety on the streets.
- Using hospitals as an example, Jones said some may say doctors and surgeons are the most important people in those buildings - but they're a small percentage of the folks working in hospitals and they're supported by an entire team of nurses, technicians, clerks and other staff. *"In today's world, if policing ran that building, they'd insist that everyone was a doctor," he said. "And that doesn't work. ... I can tell you that the supports need to be there. But it's not always about more police officers; it's about more supports that can address some of these issues."* - The Record Newspaper

"We just can't default everything to the police...we have got to look at different ways of doing things..."

Kash Heed

- We are unique in our system in BC whereby the police can't lay charges, that is left to the Crown Counsel.
- One attendee asked about whether we should be returning to police liaison officers in our high school.
- Jones stressed that homelessness, mental health and addictions are not crimes, but they can sometimes result in nuisance behaviours that others have to deal with. He said it's wrong to use crime statistics to argue with people who feel unsafe or feel like there is more disorder in their community, as those feelings are based on their individual experiences. – The Record Newspaper
- The attempt by the Government of BC to decriminalize small amounts of hard drugs has sent the wrong message and is having unintended and negative consequences in our cities.
- The best form of crime prevention can be something as simple as adding a significant number of patio seats outside our retail establishments and restaurants.
- Jones mentioned how investments in public infrastructure like artificial turf fields have proven to be great crime prevention measures.
- We need to delink the issues of mental health and being unhoused with criminality. Furthermore, we need to be advocating more vociferously for senior orders of government to make significantly more investments in direct support for people to receive drug rehabilitation and mental health treatment.
- Ms. Heafey commented that things are not getting better at the NWPD and that many of their processes, policies and procedures are rooted in the past and there appears to be a hesitancy to make serious reforms. It was one of the reasons she indicates that she cut short her term on the New West Police Board.
- *"Police are having a really hard time, the frontlines especially,"* Heafey said. *"And what I'm very disappointed about is there's not a willingness to try something else, another way of doing things, another way of doing policing, another way of structuring the police. And that was not welcome at all. So, for me, it was not very progressive."* – The Record Newspaper
- One of the biggest rounds of applause of the night came when a Queen's Park resident questioned how citizens able to have discussions with civic leaders who are *"are more concerned about policing what we say and not about actual policing."* He said his concerns were in response to some residents' comments being labelled as stigmatizing of vulnerable populations, after a local mom's appearance on a radio program and expressed concern about crime and public safety, which included finding two dead bodies in her neighbourhood. – The Record Newspaper
- *"I really wanted the police service in New West to try it or just think about it or to plan it; just a thought. And all I got was: 'No, the union wouldn't like it,'"* Heafey told attendees at the forum. *"So that shortly after that, I left. Because progress, you have to think about progress."* – The Record Newspaper

***"Police are having
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Shirley Heafey

- One attendee noted that the Peer Assisted Crisis Team (PACT), which is being piloted in New Westminster, recently expanded its hours. Another pointed out that city council had recently supported implementation of a pilot project to address the crises of homelessness, mental health and substance use. – The Record Newspaper
- *"Public safety should not be politicized. Public safety crosses everybody, from the rich to the poor. It crosses everybody in our communities, whether you're young, whether you're old. And when we politicize that, we cause problems...very simply put, everybody has a right to be safe. Everybody has a right to be safe within the environment they find themselves in. So from the person who's living in the home that's multi-millions and has all the alarm systems, they deserve to be safe, to the person who's potentially homeless, sleeping in a tent or something, they deserve to be safe."* – Dave Jones from The Record Newspaper
- A resident asked whether a Metro Police force makes sense given the fractured nature of our policing in the region.
- Heed said crisis prevention units are being launched in cities like Seattle, Portland and Oakland, and they're all tied into services that have been handled, by default, by police departments. *"If you want to look at something like that, if we want to be really creative, we should look at it from a regional perspective, so we can get those resources,"* he said. – The Record Newspaper
- Efforts to tackle crime and public safety will just keep "spinning" without significant change.
- It was noted that a number of people in a leadership position within our community did not want the forum to take place out of fear it would not be respectful to people living with mental illness or the unhoused. Coun. Fontaine noted at the end of the evening how respectful and informative the dialogue was and how this should be encouraged in the future.
- *"Some people didn't want us to have this gathering tonight,"* Fontaine told the crowd. *"They told Coun. Minhas and I: Don't do this; don't bring people together because you're going to get people riled up. I don't see any people here riled up. I see people tonight who are concerned about their community, have some great ideas and some great comments."* – The Record Newspaper
- Couns. Fontaine and Minhas committed to writing a brief summary of the evening discussion and forwarding it to all members of Council and the New West Police Board.
- The session wrapped up just prior to 9 pm with both Coun. Fontaine and Minhas thanking the panelists and everyone who attended.

"Jones stressed that homelessness, mental health and addictions are not crimes, but they can sometimes result in nuisance behaviours that others have to deal with."

Record Newspaper – Nov 9, 2023

The following questions were prepared for the panelists. We were able to get through approximately 80% of them before we shifted to questions directly from the audience.

1. **Dave Jones:** As a former police chief, someone who was responsible for policing both here in New Westminster and TransLink for many years, how do you respond to people who say that street disorder and crime is getting worse, not better in our city?
2. **Shirley Heafey:** You are a former Police Board member in New Westminster and have extensive knowledge and understanding of the RCMP and other police operations. From your perspective, what are we doing right and what are we doing wrong when it comes to addressing the issues of crime and safety in New West?
3. **Kash Heed:** You are now a city councillor and must be grappling with these issues from that front. But as the former Solicitor General, can you speak about the role of cities versus senior orders of government when it comes to having the primary responsibility to address the issues of crime and street disorder? In particular, do you have any thoughts about the Province's attempts to legalize illicit drug use in British Columbia?
4. **Dave Jones:** I've heard that many police officers are frustrated in that they often are hamstrung and can't deal with the issues facing them on the streets due to a number of reasons. In particular, our police are often having to play the role of mental health support worker as well as enforcing our laws. Can you speak at all to the issue of a lack of mental health supports and treatment facilities when it comes to impacting police operations in our city? Our region?
5. **Shirley Heafey:** You have mentioned to me in the past that we have to move beyond simply talking about these problems and we need to start implementing solutions. One of those you have referenced is 'tiered policing'. Can you explain what tiered policing is and if New West Police is embracing this model? If not, why not?
6. **Kash Heed:** A number of months ago Councillor Paul Minhas and I tried to get a motion passed at Council to start up a Crime and Safety Committee. It was intended to focus some of the attention and resources at city hall toward doing what we have control over to reduce crime and improve the safety of residents. It was defeated by a vote of 5-2. Do you think city hall has any role to play when it comes to addressing some of the issues that have been making headlines, or is this solely a job for the Police Board and policing staff?
7. **Dave Jones:** I've heard a lot about 'cycles' in New West and how over the years things have gotten really bad, then it gets cleaned up, then we cycle back down to more public disorder again. Can you comment on how you think COVID may have played a role at driving us back into a downward cycle once again?

8. **Shirley Heafey:** What suggestions and recommendations do you have to the New West Police, city staff and elected officials when it comes to reducing crime and street disorder in order to help everyone feel safer on our streets?
9. **Kash Heed:** There are some people who say having a public forum like this does little more than stoke fear, increase stigma and put our marginalized communities at risk of further harm. What do you say to those critics and how important is it to you to allow the public the opportunity to weigh in and express their concerns in a public forum like this?

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

Kash Heed

Kash Heed was elected to Richmond City Council in October 2022. He began his public service 45 years ago with the Vancouver Police Department, where he ascended through the ranks by transitioning law enforcement in the Vancouver area from traditional responses to contemporary approaches. He pioneered initiatives aimed at crime reduction and prevention as well as greater community and police engagement. He held high profile commands in the fields of drug and gang enforcement, rising to the rank of Superintendent before leaving to become the Chief Constable of the West Vancouver Police Department, creating history by becoming the first South Asian head of a police force in North America.



Kash initiated a major reengineering of the West Vancouver Police Department, moving towards a decentralized police bureaucracy with stronger function commands that are more responsive to community needs, while ensuring better trained and motivated police officers. This included a comprehensive and assertive strategy for noticeably reducing crime, and fear of crime, with particular emphasis placed on engaging stakeholders and creating accountability.

During his time in policing, Kash earned the reputation as a highly visible leader with a history of planning, implementing, and completing large-scale projects that have influenced police policies and actions across the region. He is acknowledged as the key architect and unfailing champion of Metro Vancouver's use of COMPSTAT, a data management system that uses high level computer generated crime statistics to direct the best use of police resources. He is an accomplished professional whose fortitude, innovation, and leadership skills have elevated policing benchmarks, developed sustainable human talent, and strengthened community relationships. He was selected as one of the top 100 influential South Asians making a difference in British Columbia, and in both 2008 and 2009, he was named to the Power 50 list of movers and shakers in BC.

In 2009, Kash was elected to the BC Legislative Assembly representing Vancouver-Fraserview. After being elected, he was appointed as the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, a post he held until April 2010.

Kash holds a Master of Arts degree from the School of Criminology and a Bachelor of General Studies degree in the field of Leadership in Public Safety from Simon Fraser University. He is a published author, an Adjunct Professor, and a strong and vocal advocate for smarter approaches to law enforcement and drug policy. Kash is one of the preeminent authorities worldwide on these approaches and is the subject of several news items and documentaries.

Kash has lived in Richmond for the past 57 years and has a beloved daughter Ella, who is fifteen.

Shirley Heafey

Shirley Heafey's legacy of public service, both in her legal career and through work in the community, demonstrates a deep passion for advocacy around human rights, policing, and employment law. She served as Chair and CEO of the RCMP Public Complaints Commission for a decade, where she pursued various reforms. Shirley continued that work for many more years with the Calgary Police and developed a collaborative and proactive relationship with the Service. Those experiences, along with expertise



conducting oversight of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service earlier in her career, enabled her to advise a group of Syrian Canadians during their legal battle with the Canadian government, for human rights violations that led to torture overseas. Since 2017 she has served on the BC Employment and Assistance Appeal Tribunal and recently ended a 3-year tenure as a member of the New Westminster Police Board.

A tireless advocate for justice, Shirley was previously a member of the Alberta Human Rights Tribunal. She served on the boards of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, the BC Civil Liberties Association and the Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter. She also supported the Canadian Mental Health Association in their work training police to help people in a mental health crisis and previously served as advisor to Vancouver Pride Society. Shirley's Alma Mater, Ottawa U Law School, inducted her into the Honour Society for outstanding contribution to national and international work in human rights.

Dave Jones

David Jones, O.O.M., began his policing career in 1982 as a volunteer with the Reserve Police Section of the NWPD, and in 2011 he became the 21st Chief Constable for the NWPD. In April 2019 Chief Jones was selected as the new Chief Officer of the Metro Vancouver Transit Police overseeing policing and security for public transportation within

the Metro Vancouver Region This new role includes being part of the Senior Executive for Translink BC.

During his career Dave worked in a variety of sections of the police service including Patrol, Major Crimes Section, Special Operations Unit, Drug Section, Community Services Section, and Street Crimes Unit. In addition he has worked on a variety of joint policing initiatives including a secondment with the RCMP Provincial Drug Enforcement Unit.

Dave has led and participated in numerous major projects, including the downtown initiative that dealt with an influx of crack cocaine dealers in the late 1990s. In addition, Chief Constable Jones worked with various city departments in the creation of the Integrated Service Team (IST) model that is still in effect today that deals collectively with community and policing issues.

Chief Jones has received recognition for various investigations and events in the form of Chief Constable Commendation, Sr. Officer's Commendation, Queen's Jubilee Medal and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal. In May of 2013, the Governor General of Canada presented the Member of the Order of Merit of the Police Forces medal to Chief Jones, recognizing commitment to this country and to honour a career of exceptional service within policing in Canada and in 2017 he was promoted within the Order of Merit from Member to Officer.

In 2016 Chief Jones was recognized by Douglas College with their prestigious Honorary Fellowship Designation, as recognition for distinguished service to the community.



Chief Jones holds a Master of Law Degree York University - Osgoode Hall Law School, a Bachelor of General Studies degree from Simon Fraser University on Leadership, Senior Executive leadership and Strategic Planning certification from Queens University - Smith School of Business.

Chief Jones has been involved in key leadership positions on numerous boards and committees including, Chairperson PRIME BC, Co-Chair National Police Services Advisory Committee, Executive Board, Vice Chair of BC Association of Municipal Chiefs of Police, Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, board member Organized Crime Agency BC. He is the current Judicial Chair for the BC Soccer Association, covering over 100,000 members.

In his leadership role Chief Jones has worked with and presented to local communities, educational institutions, and other justice system partners. He has worked in partnership with all levels of government and has presented at international symposiums on leadership

Chief Jones is actively involved in the local community soccer and sports programs and currently chairs the Coquitlam Field Sports Association representing field sport users and organizations with over 8,000 participants.

MEDIA COVERAGE

- [New West Councillors hosting a crime and public safety forum](#) - Record Newspaper - September 28, 2023
- [Crime and Public Safety - What happened at the Crime and Public Safety Forum - Record Newspaper](#) - November 9, 2023
- [Mike Smyth Show CKNW Interview with Coun. Fontaine](#) - October 13, 2023
- [Mike Smyth Show CKNW Interview with Coun. Nadine Nakagawa](#) - Oct 25, 2023
- Global BC and CityNews also covered the story (no online links available)

COUNCILLOR RESPONSE

Coun. Daniel Fontaine + Coun. Paul Minhas

We really appreciated how well attended the townhall forum was and the respectful manner in which it was conducted. It was great to see so many residents and business owners come out to have a dialogue on the issue of crime and public safety.

While there were many excellent points made, we think the one that resonated the most for us was the opportunity to explore the concept of tiered policing. In places like Vancouver, they also have a long history of implementing the Downtown Ambassador Program which is funded through their Business Improvement Area. They are not police, but rather an additional set of 'eyes and ears' on the street that can work collaboratively with our police force. This is something we should give serious consideration to in our city.

It was also great to hear that City Council can play a very important role in helping to reduce crime and improve public safety. That can come in many forms including something as simple as dramatically adding more patio spaces on our main commercial roads or building artificial turf fields. It was noted that people feel safer when there are more people on the street, something for which Council has direct control over.

Lastly, a huge thanks to our panelists who volunteered their time to engage with the community. There was a tremendous amount of positive feedback from the attendees and we all felt that we learned a bit more on how to make the Royal City an ever safer place to live.