

Report Windsor Police Service Board (May 20, 2021)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In December of 2019 Councilor Patricia Simone of Amherstburg invited several community service groups, sports organizations and churches (non-profits & charities) to the first Round Table Discussion Group held at the Libro Credit Union Centre in Amherstburg. This group was initiated with the goal of providing opportunity for our community groups to meet on a regular basis to discuss the needs of our Town and coordinate their efforts to meet those needs, discuss innovative approaches to challenges they face, share resources and network with other like-minded individuals. The number of groups in attendance has grown and new partnerships have formed, mutual support and networking have taken place. We have found this group forum especially helpful in the dark days of the pandemic when many groups have displayed optimism and innovation in their approach to community service. We have seen great benefits in the networking events, now done virtually. Needs have been identified and we have seen great unity and increased service delivery even through the pandemic. One of the greatest challenges our community groups face is to continue to recruit, train and support the many volunteers needed to continue to reach the people we serve. As you can imagine, in these days of pandemic, all services are done safely, one-on-one and social distanced, which requires more and more volunteers to do the important work of care and compassion, social engagement and offering support of various kinds. One of the many challenges we also face is the great financial impact of the pandemic on community service organizations. Organizations are experiencing reduced revenue from the lack of ability to do large scale fundraising events which has impacted their overall budget and cash flow. As well, we see individuals serving who may have experienced impact from lost income creating a challenge with fees and expenses associated with volunteering their time.

REQUEST:

Many of the organizations participating in the ongoing conversations, the group we refer to as A.C.T. (Amherstburg Community Team) have put together request letters for your consideration which are attached to this report. It's our hope that the Police Service Board will consider waiving the fees associated with vulnerable sector criminal record checks. Each organization has expressed the difficulty they are experiencing in covering costs associated with the recruitment, training and deployment of their volunteers in these days.

Many of the insurance providers for the organizations represented here have clearly stated policy guidelines for vulnerable sector checks regarding how organizations must comply with the regulations in place to keep everyone safe. We have provided one newsletter as an example from Robertson Hall which is one of the larger insurance companies servicing the non-profit and charity sector. It is important to note that it is often the case volunteers who serve in multiple organizations must acquire multiple clearances at significant cost to the organizations or individual. Some of the volunteers also must go through the added expense of fingerprinting depending on their circumstance which adds to the cost.

Often times the costs of these clearances are borne by the volunteers themselves, especially in the case of newer organizations who have very limited funding. In the current environment, where more volunteers are needed to adequately meet the needs and serve in new and innovate ways, with more one-on-one interaction required to safely provide services, the fees associated with volunteering add one more barrier to recruitment and retention of volunteers. We must emphasize the tremendous reliance our organizations have on the volunteers who serve in various capacities; we simply can't do what we do without them. They are essential to the work.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATION:

We are not unaware of the administrative costs associate with provision of vulnerable sector criminal record checks. We respect and deeply appreciate the countless hours of administrative work required to conduct the many request for these record checks. We also acknowledge that the funding model for local, municipal Police Service Boards may be very different from that of the provincially funded OPP Service. Many of our volunteers have difficulty understanding why, if they live in an area serviced by OPP, these clearances are provided free of charge compared to living in an area serviced by Municipal funded Police Service there are fees associated. We understand that there may be many reasons why the fees have been necessary in the past. We acknowledge all that our municipal Police Services do to provide excellent

service, care and support to our community and are extremely thankful for each and every public servant who plays a role in keeping our communities safe. Thank you.

We simply ask that you also consider some of the following as you consider our request to waive fees:

- a. The various community service organizations, sports clubs, and churches represented in this request provide valued services to our community and are currently experiencing unusual and difficult financial burdens due to the Covid19 Pandemic
- b. It is increasingly difficult to maintain a healthy, engaged, positive volunteer force and the more barriers we can remove from our valued volunteers, the better we can serve and meet the needs of the community.
- c. Many of the programs and services, ministry and support groups provided by the non-profit, charitable and sports organizations represented in this request are extremely beneficial and a vital part in sustaining healthy, thriving and optimistic communities.

RECOMMENDATION:

At this time, we would recommend

- that the Police Service Board undertake a review of the fees associated with providing vulnerable sector criminal record checks to volunteers offering their services to registered non-profit groups and charities
- and further that if at all possible these fees be waived for volunteers of those groups
- and further that they communicate the result of their review and decision regarding the request in a timely fashion to the undersigned

ALTERNATE CONSIDERATION:

As determined by the Police Service Board

Thank you all for your time and consideration and for the exemplary way you serve our community. We are in this together!

Respectfully submitted by:

Representatives of ACT

Kathy DiBartolomeo, Executive Director, Amherstburg Community Services

Joanne Fear, Regional Director, Safe Families Windsor-Essex / Administrative Assistant, Lighthouse Church

Blanche Durocher, Chair of the Board of Directors, The House Youth Centre

Cindy Hazael-Gietz, Administrative Assistant, ACT