

## **Police weigh earlier start to recruiting, McIver urges hometown solution**

Monday 20 August 2007

Calgary Herald

by Sean Myers

Calgary police should start recruiting in local high schools to stem a growing shortage of new officers, say two members of the police commission. Aldermen Craig Burrows and Ric McIver attended a panel discussion on recruitment and retention hosted by the Canadian Association of Police Boards during its annual conference Sunday. The panel discussed under-staffing in police departments as being on the verge of becoming a national crisis.

"We need to stop chasing around to the other side of the planet for our hiring and look right here at home in our high schools," said McIver. "We want a police force that represents the cross-cultural community that exists here, and I think what we want are police officers from this city's cross-cultural sector."

In Calgary, Chief Jack Beaton recently expressed concern over the lack of applications that the police force is receiving -- just 350 for the year by early August. City police are short by about 120 front-line officers, he said.

Nationwide, 7,000 new recruits are needed annually, but less than half of that succeed in the application process, said Geoffrey Gruson, executive director of the Canadian Police Sector Council. The answer might be to abandon the traditional target age of 25 to 28 for new applicants and go after teenagers still mulling over their career options. "We have no choice; we can't afford to wait the eight- to 10-year period between the point they finish high school and the point we traditionally start looking at them," said Gruson, one of five people on the panel. "That's a black hole when they may be lured by any number of career opportunities." Members of the panel suggested a national marketing campaign should also be launched to counter negative impressions of police officers.

Dale Kinnear of the Canadian Police Association said we're now paying for decisions of the past by provincial and municipal governments to police "on the cheap." He pointed out that Canada has a police-to-population ratio of 186 per 100,000, far below countries such as the United States, Australia and the U.K., all above 300. Kinnear said police organizations need to work together. "Traditionally we've been acting department by department, city by city, province by province. It's time we start behaving as an employment sector," said Kinnear. "Provinces and municipalities need to work together on recruiting."

Ald. Craig Burrows, also on the police commission, said a new recruiting strategy for Calgary will be discussed by the board in September, and a funding request will be made in the October budget. He said the strategy shouldn't over-emphasize university graduates at the expense of smart high school grads with a facility for police work. "We're hiring everyone assuming they want to be chief," said Burrows. "Let's also hire people who want to be a beat cop, a constable. That can be a rewarding, fulfilling career." The 18th annual police boards conference -- themed risk management -- wraps up today at the Hyatt Regency.