

Crime Prevention Ottawa says it is time to move on from Vanier

MICHELLE NASH / Ottawa this Week
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The recent creation of a health and safety committee as part of the Vanier Community Association has provided Crime Prevention Ottawa with the opportunity to move on to focus its efforts on other areas of the city.

Crime Prevention Ottawa set up shop in Vanier in 2007, helping with the establishment of the community association as well as the formation of a working group on beautification.

The working group on crime prevention has remained the one area in which Crime Prevention Ottawa as stayed particularly active in Vanier.

It was only recently when the community association created the health and safety committee that Crime Prevention Ottawa decided to step back and hand over the reins to committee chairman Geoff Derry.

"We need to scale back our involvement in Vanier," said Nancy Worsfold, the executive director of Crime Prevention Ottawa. "It is really important the community owns the initiatives. We are hoping that we can move forward and the VCA will take on the drugs and prostitutes issues."

Derry said the challenge may be significant, but he is hoping to tackle the issues and concerns one at a time.

Crime Prevention Ottawa held their first joint meeting with the health and safety committee, also one of their final meetings in the area, on Nov. 9.

"We have mentioned that we have a direction that we need to be working with other communities," Worsfold told those gathered at that meeting.

Although some residents have been wary of Crime Prevention Ottawa scaling back its presence in Vanier, others who attended the meeting were happy to see the community association move forward.

"I am looking forward to taking the dialogue to the next step – to become more action oriented," said Lucie Marleau, co-chairwoman of the beautification group, who was at the meeting.

Crime Prevention Ottawa will not be fully severing ties with the association, however. A liaison officer, Élyse Robertson, will continue to work with the community through the Centre des services communautaires Vanier. The centre itself will also be taking on a much larger role in the community.



Beautification committee celebrates the holidays. The working group on Beautification in Vanier is a very successful committee which was started up with the help of Crime Prevention Ottawa. Crime Prevention Ottawa (CPO) helped with the start up of the Vanier Community Association and has been holding meetings for the working group on crime prevention in the area, however is looking forward to handing the over the task of working on crime prevention to a newly created sub-committee of the VCA. *Michelle Nash*

"Community leadership is important and we look forward to watching this unfold. Vanier has great community leadership," Worsfold added.

She admitted that funding issues are playing a part in the decision to step back, as the organization is looking to focus its attention on other areas of the city.

"We will not leave them in a lurch, but we do want to move on," Worsfold said.

Irvin Waller, a professor in the criminology department at the University of Ottawa and founder and past director of the university's Institute for the Prevention of Crime said the role of Crime Prevention Ottawa is meant to spark change in a community.

"I see Crime Prevention Ottawa as a catalyst that enabled them to do something they have never have done before," Waller said. "And that is important for neighbourhood safety for residents to collectively decide to take action."

He did say, however, that there is a limit to what citizens can achieve.

"When you empower citizens to work together and give them confidence, you achieve some results," Waller said. "You reduce street prostitution, but what you have to look to after that is do these problems just move somewhere else? What about trying to solve the problems?"

The answers to those questions he said come in the form of funding for prevention programming.

"What really underlies this is the issue of sourcing from the city and the province," Waller said. "If we want to help a neighbourhood to feel safe we have to provide resources to make it happen."

Ottawa-Vanier MPP Madeleine Meilleur, who was appointed minister of community safety and corrections in October, said the government has made significant investments in prevention programs across the province.

But when it comes to fighting crime in Vanier, Meilleur said the best answer is for all levels of the community to work together.

"When I was municipal councillor, we did not have such an organization as Crime Prevention Ottawa, we always promoted to all work together," Meilleur said. "It is not all on the police, it is everyone's responsibility. (The residents) need good community organization and good community policing and the BIA (Quartier Vanier) all working together."

Meilleur said she thinks what Vanier has been doing has already been quite successful.

"Vanier has improved and thanks to groups who have organized themselves and the work together to raise issues to the police," Meilleur said.

Derry said he is hoping to get the ball rolling, intending to run monthly meetings in the community, with Robertson's help. The first meeting was set to be held on Nov. 22.

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