



NATIONAL  
POLICE  
FEDERATION

FÉDÉRATION  
DE LA POLICE  
NATIONALE

# What We Heard

**Community Engagement Town Halls**

**Cumberland County Policing Service  
Review**

**April 2023**



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Overview | What We Heard**

Through the National Police Federation's (NPF) community engagement town halls in March 2023, we heard loud and clear that residents of Cumberland County do not want to move away from the RCMP and establish a new police service. Residents participating in the town halls overwhelmingly expressed that, instead of establishing a new police service, they would rather see investments made into the current RCMP policing model.

### **Background**

In March 2022, the Municipality of Cumberland County Council voted in favour of a motion to review the county's policing services. Council then appointed a Policing Services Review Committee, comprised of the mayor, members of Council, and members of the public to review the current state of policing in the county and to provide recommendations on the different options moving forward.

The committee, after conducting an internal review, proposed two recommendations to council: Improve the service provided by the RCMP; or issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a new police service provider. In December 2022, Council decided to move forward with issuing an RFP, and in April 2023, Council formally approved and issued the RFP for applicants.

### **NPF's Community Engagement**

After hearing about Council's interest in reviewing Cumberland County's policing service model and delivery, the NPF facilitated a series of in-person and virtual community engagement town halls to inform residents of the ongoing policing services review, hear about their public safety priorities, and solicit feedback that we could share with Council.

From March 3 to 5, 2023, the NPF hosted five in-person town halls in Parrsboro, Springhill, Pugwash, Oxford, and Amherst. We also facilitated a virtual town hall on March 23, 2023. All six sessions were open to the public. In addition, all members of Council, including the mayor, were invited to join us at any town hall that was convenient for them. In total, there were over 90 people who attended the in-person and virtual town halls.

This report is a summary of what we heard during the community engagement town hall sessions.

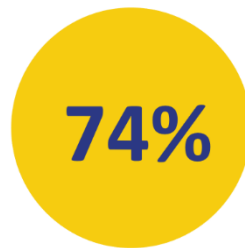
## WHAT WE HEARD

### By the Numbers

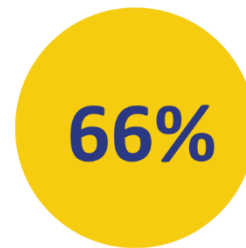
There is tremendous amount of community support and a high-level of satisfaction with the RCMP and the services that are provided to Nova Scotia and Cumberland County. Below are results from an opinion survey of the RCMP in Nova Scotia from July 2022, conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights. It's important to note that this research was conducted following ongoing Mass Casualty Commission testimony and critical media coverage.



of Nova Scotians served by the RCMP are **satisfied with the policing service they receive.**



of Nova Scotians believe that the RCMP is **accountable to the communities they serve.**



of Nova Scotians agree that **they benefit from the federal contribution of the cost of RCMP policing.**

The vast majority of Nova Scotians are satisfied with the RCMP services provided to communities, and we were able to confirm this support during the town halls.

As part of a letter-writing campaign we started, over 200 residents have sent letters to local Council expressing their concern for a possible change in policing services. This includes nearly 100 people since the announcement of the RFP.

### Key Themes

Throughout our engagement we heard about the many positive interactions that people have experienced with their local Cumberland RCMP Members as well as the public safety challenges and concerns that residents face. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of residents told us that they do not want to move away from the RCMP and have a new police service provider. Instead of putting money towards a new police contract or even a police transition, they would rather see the same funds invested in the current RCMP in their community.

The following are key themes of discussion that were raised by participants during the town halls. It's important to note that those in attendance also acknowledged the need for other tools to reduce crime in the community in addition to police services. Examples that were mentioned include social supports, crime prevention programs, community engagement projects, and mental health and addiction services.

**1) Low awareness and motivation for the policing service review**

Many residents at the outset of the town halls mentioned they did not know that Cumberland County was undertaking a police service review, nor did they know how far along the County was in their review process. This led them to express frustration over the fact that they were not made aware of this process or that they missed the chance to participate in any of the County’s 2022 public consultations.

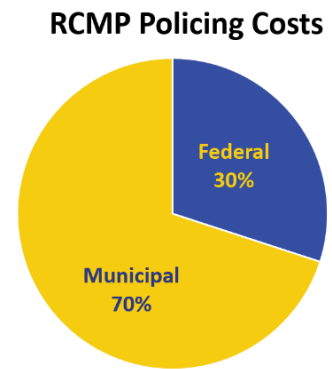
Attendees felt like they had no ability to state their views or opinions to Council regarding the County’s police of jurisdiction and the review was not being done with enough transparency. Furthermore, they wished for the chance to properly and formally provide their input through a public consultation opportunity. Some even suggested that any move towards a new police service should be done by a plebiscite or referendum, allowing the people to directly vote on the future of policing.

Residents also questioned why a policing services review was initiated, to which the NPF responded that individuals should direct this question to their local Councillor or the Mayor for more information.

In summary, residents wanted more transparency into Council’s process, decision, and rationale for initiating a policing services review and for looking at alternative policing providers.

**2) High cost of a police service transition**

Residents consistently expressed shock at the cost of a potential police service transition as well as any ongoing annual cost to manage a municipal Cumberland County police service. Most people who attended the town halls were unaware of the federal contribution that is made to Cumberland County’s policing service, which covers 30% of the total cost of the Cumberland RCMP. They were also surprised with all the other policing costs such as specialized services, equipment, indemnification, and human resources and information technology that the RCMP provide at little to no cost to Cumberland County.



Attendees expressed their dismay at the higher cost per capita of operating/funding a municipal police service like Amherst Police Department, which has twice the cost per capita when compared to the rest of Cumberland County.<sup>i</sup>

	Amherst	Cumberland RCMP
Police Budget (2021-2022)	\$4,554,907.00	\$4,701,412.00
Population (2021)	9,404	19,964.00
Cost per capita	\$484.36	\$235.49
Officers (2021-2022)	24	30
Crime Severity Index (2010-2020 Average)	113.16	63.72

Residents told us that they feared that their taxes would be raised by the municipality to pay for the higher costs of a new police service. This is something they were alarmed about as it would be financially difficult to afford any potential increased tax rates, especially given the ongoing inflation and higher prices for food, gas, electricity, and other necessities.

Moreover, we heard that before Council makes any decisions, they should conduct a thorough feasibility study that identifies and itemizes all costs and implications associated with such a transition.

Finally, people didn't feel it was worth using taxpayer money to transition away from the RCMP and potentially pay more for another police service. They would rather invest more money directly into the current policing model to improve the existing services they have now at a lower cost.

### **3) Appreciation of RCMP specialized services**

Similarly, a broad concern was having to pay for the use of all RCMP specialized services if the County transitions to a municipal police service. We heard from people that they were unaware of the fact that the RCMP provides these specialized services to all regions in its jurisdiction at little or no cost and that the RCMP will be charging on a per-use basis the cost of their specialized services to other municipal/regional police services in Nova Scotia.

## Specialized services offered to Cumberland County

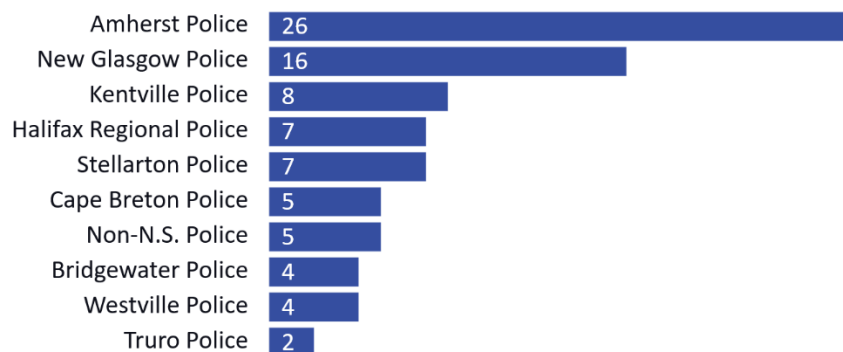
Tactical and Specialized Operations	Investigative Services	Operational Communications and Emergency Operational Coordination
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Officer Program</li> <li>• Critical Incident Program</li> <li>• Crisis Negotiation Team</li> <li>• Emergency Response Team</li> <li>• Emergency Medical Response Team</li> <li>• Explosive Disposal Unit</li> <li>• Police Dog Service</li> <li>• Provincial Ground Search and Rescue Program</li> <li>• Underwater Recovery Team</li> <li>• Special Tactical Operation</li> <li>• Tactical Support Group</li> <li>• Traffic Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collision Analysis and Reconstruction Services</li> <li>• Commercial Crime Unit</li> <li>• Cyber Crime Coordinator</li> <li>• Division <u>Criminal Analysis</u> Section</li> <li>• Digital Forensic Services</li> <li>• Forensic Identification Services</li> <li>• Human Trafficking Unit</li> <li>• Internet Child Exploitation Unit</li> <li>• Interview Assistance</li> <li>• Major Crimes Unit</li> <li>• Proceeds of Crime Unit</li> <li>• Synthetic Drugs Unit</li> <li>• Truth Verification</li> <li>• Violent Crime Linkage Analysis Unit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division Emergency Operations Centre</li> <li>• Provincial Operational Communications Centre</li> <li>• Risk Manager Program</li> <li>• Division Liaison Team</li> <li>• Operational Communications Centre</li> <li>• Employee Management Relations Office</li> </ul>

People grew more concerned about this issue once learning that the Amherst Police Department, the only other municipal police service in Cumberland County, had the highest number of calls for RCMP specialized services between January and December 2021.

It is important to note that RCMP detachment commander Craig Learning stated at a town hall that every single specialized service that the county has access to has been used at least once in the course of the last year (between March 2022 and March 2023). Paying for those services separately would mean increased policing costs for the County.

### **Municipal Police Service Calls for Specialized Services from the RCMP**

January 2021 to December 2021



#### **4) Policing visibility in communities**

The biggest public safety concern residents expressed during the town halls was the lack of police visibility in their community. People in each location told us that they felt there is an inadequate police presence and that they want more police officers in their community. Moreover, people misunderstood the level of control of police visibility that the County has with the RCMP. Most people did not know that it is the responsibility of the Municipality of Cumberland County – not the federal government or the RCMP – to increase (or decrease) the level of RCMP officers in their community.

Currently, under the Provincial Police Service Agreement (PPSA) the Cumberland RCMP detachment has 30 Regular Member positions. That does not account for soft vacancies, such as sick leave, annual leave, training, family related leave, etc, and hard vacancies such as a Member being transferred out, retiring, or resigning (a hard vacancy is permanent and can be backfilled). Increasing police visibility is something that can be done exclusively by Council through increasing its annual policing budget. Through Nova Scotia’s Provincial Policing Service Agreement, Cumberland County can add more officers to raise police visibility/presence at an approximate all-in cost of \$180,000 per additional officer per year.<sup>ii</sup>

#### **5) Invest and improve rather than replace**

Residents stated clearly that they do not want to move towards a new municipal police service, but would rather improve the current RCMP police services in the County. They felt that the entire police review and RFP process is not a good use of taxpayer dollars. Moreover, the two most common suggestions residents had for municipal investments included hiring more RCMP officers and enhancing local engagement between the Cumberland RCMP detachment and the community.

Residents understood that while it would cost more money from the County’s tax base to hire more officers, they would prefer to increase the number of RCMP Members at a more cost-effective rate rather

than fund a new municipal police service. This would increase police visibility while limiting any municipal budget increases and possible property tax increases to residents.

In terms of local engagement, people told us that they wanted the County to be more transparent and consistent with the amount of information that is available to them about policing. Attendees suggested that the County work with the RCMP to publish the quarterly/annual public safety plans made by Council and the RCMP, release more detailed crime statistics, and enable members of the public to have greater input on the public safety priorities.

## **CONCLUSION**

We heard many concerns from residents about moving away from the RCMP and towards a new police service. They thought it was an unnecessary move to improve the current police services provided to the County and a poor use of taxpayer money. We call on Council to take these views into consideration, continue to conduct further consultation, and commission a comprehensive study from an independent third-party that can outline all possible policing service options and associated changes, costs, and risks to public safety for Cumberland residents.

Again, the NPF supports police service reviews in all jurisdictions. However, we urge all municipalities to undergo a thorough, transparent, and independent review process so that residents are fully aware of all relevant policing information, costs and potential impacts.

## **ABOUT THE NPF**



The National Police Federation (NPF) is the sole certified bargaining agent representing ~20,000 Members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) across Canada and internationally, including about 990 Members in Nova Scotia and 33 in Cumberland County. The NPF is the largest police labour relations organization in Canada and our mission is to provide strong, fair, and progressive representation to promote and enhance the rights of RCMP Members.

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<sup>1</sup>Town of Amherst. *Municipal Operating Budget 2021-2022*. <https://www.amherst.ca/budget.html>; Cumberland County. *Municipal Operating Budget 2021-2022*. <https://cumberlandcounty.ns.ca/finance.html>; Statistics Canada. 2021 Population Census Data. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>; Town of Amherst. *Amherst Police Sustainability Report*. <https://www.amherst.ca/police-department.html>; Statistics Canada. *Crime severity index and weighted clearance rates, police services in the Atlantic provinces*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510018601>

<sup>11</sup> Halifax District RCMP. *Multi-Year Funding Request for Resources, 2023-2026*. Page 9. December 14, 2022. <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/boards-committees-commissions/230111bopc71.pdf>