

MEMORANDUM



To: Kingston Police Services Board (VIA Chief A. McNeely)
From: Inspector Matt Funnell #240
Date: November 12, 2021
Re: 2021 Queen's Homecoming Deployment

Each year, along with a number of community and City partners, the Kingston Police plan for the anticipated large gatherings and unsanctioned street and house parties associated with the annual Queen's University Homecoming celebrations. In 2020, Queen's University was operating mostly virtual and because of COVID-19 restrictions, Kingston did not see a large influx of people attending school, nor participating in large gatherings. For 2021, Queen's University returned to in-person studies, and with that, University representatives advised Kingston Police that approximately 20,000 students were enrolled. With last year being under restrictions and this year returning more to normal, we faced unique planning challenges with two cohorts of students yearning to experience, for the first time, the allure of the well-established street parties associated with Queen's Homecoming. Homecoming activities were virtual this year, and set for the weekend of October 15-17, 2021. I will detail the specifics of our deployment of resources for Homecoming weekend, but for context I am providing some background from the first-year student residence move-in operation, and how the momentum of street parties grew leading into the declared Homecoming weekend, and beyond into a second consecutive weekend of unsanctioned street and house parties, which required a considerable increase in police response to maintain the peace and public order.

Background:

From September 1-4, 2021, Queen's University set out a 4 day "moving in" period, where first-year students would arrive and move into residence at a specified date and time. This staggered approach caused an increase of approximately 1,000 students arriving each day. In addition, it is estimated that several thousand students arrived and moved into off campus residences in the University District. This influx of students presented a problematic scenario for Kingston Police. Unlike years past, there was not an abundance of activities planned to occupy their time before classes started. During this time members of the Kingston Police Community Orientated Response and Engagement Unit deployed officers into the University District as a pro-active strategy to deter unwanted behaviors. The following observations were made:

- 2,500-5,000 students took over University Avenue between Johnson Street and Earl Street on multiple occasions;
- On September 2, 2021, 1,000+ students spilled over from University Avenue onto Johnson Street, forcing Kingston Police to close Johnson Street;

- Officers reported bottles were thrown at them and the culprits would flee into the crowds to avoid apprehension;
- Students attempted to damage cruisers and one officer reported observing a student attempt to puncture a cruiser tire with a knife; and
- One officer was assaulted when a student approached them from behind and attempted to place a plastic bag over their head.

For the following two weeks (September 5-17, 2021), a strategic enforcement plan of action was created to utilize municipal by-laws (Nuisance Party) and Provincial Liquor Laws to help curb some of the unwanted behavior:

- On September 10, 2021, the City of Kingston enacted a Municipal Emergency Order creating a new “Aggravated Nuisance Party” by-law which had a set fine of \$2,000. This by-law allowed Kingston Police to issue fines on the spot to individuals present at gatherings that exceeded the prescribed limits set out in the Reopening Ontario Act (ROA);
- During this period, Kingston Police continued to see several large gatherings and blatant violations of the ROA, the Liquor License Act, and the Criminal Code; including assault with a weapon, obstructing police, mischief, possession of stolen property, and assaulting police; and
- Officers on the ground reported an increase of students fleeing from them during investigations. This led to an increase of obstructing police charges.

The level of defiance, confrontation, and violence toward police had become unprecedented and Kingston Police continued with the strategic enforcement strategy and regularly deployed additional officers, many on overtime, into the University District on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights throughout September and October. During this time, Kingston Police obtained ongoing intelligence that students and partygoers were planning large scale, unlawful gatherings to take place during the “Virtual Homecoming” weekend of October 15-16, 2021, and in addition, were also planning an unsanctioned secondary Homecoming weekend set to take place on October 22-23, 2021. The effort was coined as a “Silent Takeover” or “Faux Coming”. Information received was that there would be a significant influx of out-of-town students and visitors attending Kingston on both weekends. Given the prolonged and sustained street parties, increase in defiance shown by the student population leading up to the Homecoming weekend, and the ongoing information that they were making concerted efforts to have large scale street gatherings and take overs, we were forced to plan for deployment of considerable police resources for both weekends, in an effort to quell the unlawful behavior and keep the peace.

From the onset of our planning weeks before, including the events after move-in and up to and including the official Homecoming weekend, we were closely monitoring student behavior, gathering ongoing intelligence from students and other sources, and monitoring online activity. We were aware that people were planning to travel to Kingston from other communities to participate in the “Silent Takeover” of our University District with the goal of making the second weekend in Kingston the “best” among all Homecoming street parties to date. An online challenge had been issued to this end, and it gained further traction from the consistent efforts of an internet influencer who had attended all Homecoming celebrations across the province. This influencer was constantly advocating for the mass gathering of people to achieve the stated “best” Homecoming goal. All information learned caused us serious concerns about the potential volatility of this year’s event, and in particular the October 22-23, 2021 weekend.

Resource Deployment:

Like in past years, Kingston Police activated an Incident Command control structure to manage and deploy police resources and logistics for the event. In addition to the highly trained public order and mounted unit contingents noted below, we also had a smaller number of officers and Special Constables assisting from Brockville, Belleville, Gananoque and Smiths Falls Police Services on both weekends. On Friday October 15, 2021, a total of 81 Kingston Police personnel were deployed, comprising of the command structure, supervisors, sworn officers, special constables, and civilian support staff. In addition, we were assisted by 108 members of Ontario Provincial Police Public Order Unit, which included command staff and a remotely piloted aircraft system (drone) and long range acoustic device (LRAD) capabilities.

While Friday night proved to be quieter than what we have seen in past years, Saturday, October 16, 2021, saw very large, rebellious, confrontational, and assaultive crowds gather. It is estimated that in addition to heavy pedestrian traffic throughout the entire University District during the day, a crowd of approximately 8,000 people gathered on Aberdeen Street. Police resources (both sworn and support staff) deployed for October 16, 2021, included 93 Kingston Police personnel, 108 members of the OPP Public Order Unit, and an additional 31 members from the Durham Regional Police Public Order Unit. As noted, the crowd was confrontational and assaultive and at times pelted police with bottles, full beer and beverage cans, and other debris. Patience and effective crowd management techniques were executed and the crowd was eventually dispersed without any major incidents; however, one Kingston Police officer was injured during an arrest where resistance was offered, and he remains on light duties as he recovers. Later in the evening and past midnight, a crowd of approximately 3,000-3,500 people gathered in Victoria Park and police were alerted to an unprovoked, stranger-on-stranger stabbing that occurred as one of the attendees was walking from the gathering. That investigation is ongoing. The large crowd that was in the park was monitored and again resources were strategically deployed and the crowd was eventually peacefully dispersed from the park, and they did not gather in large numbers on the streets.

Over this first Homecoming weekend (including Friday and Saturday) a total of 36 people were arrested and Kingston Police laid the following charges:

- 8 Criminal Code
- 34 Open Liquor
- 16 Public Intoxication
- 2 Highway Traffic Act Offences

Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMPS's):

- 3 Obstruct Police
- 15 Aggravated Nuisance party
- 10 Amplification of noise
- 1 Yelling

Given that at minimum 8,000 people participated in aggressively taking over Aberdeen Street on October 16, 2021, and the momentum was growing, we were concerned for our ability to maintain order on the subsequent weekend. All of this was further complicated by the reality that our officers on the street during the first weekend noticed the presence of individuals who prey on vulnerable populations, which brought a new and concerning dynamic to the crowd. In addition, there was a double homicide that occurred on October 16, 2021, and the investigation has shown that the two victims were seen among the large crowd that had gathered earlier in the day.

Similar to Friday October 15, Friday October 22, 2021 was relatively calm and manageable. Including the command structure, supervisors, sworn officers, special constables, and civilian support staff, a total 89 Kingston Police personnel were deployed. In addition, we were assisted by 108 members of the OPP Public Order Unit, 40 members from York Regional Police Public Order Unit, along with 63 members of the Public Order and Mounted Units from the Toronto Police Service.

Saturday October 23, 2021 saw unruly behavior more relative to Saturday October 16, 2021 in that several thousand students mulled about the University District. For this day a total of 61 Kingston Police personnel were deployed, assisted by the 108 members of OPP Public Order Unit, 63 members of Toronto Police Service Public Order and Mounted Units, 31 officers from the Durham Regional Police Public Order Unit, and 40 members of the York Regional Police Service Public Order Unit.

Deployment of police resources on October 23, 2021 was again measured and strategic, utilizing a coordinated effort between our regular contingent of officers combined with the specialty units at our disposal. Again order was established and maintained without any major incident, however a second officer sustained minor injuries during an arrest where resistance was offered. This officer was assessed at the hospital and fortunately this did not result in any time lost. Over this second weekend (including Friday and Saturday), a total of 14 people were arrested and Kingston Police laid the following charges:

- 2 Criminal Charges
- 77 Open Liquor Charges
- 9 Under Age Drinking
- 5 Public Intoxication
- 2 Trespass to Property Charges
- 4 Highway Traffic Act

Administrative Monetary Penalties (AMPS's):

- 29 Aggravated Nuisance Party
- 25 Amplified Noise
- 4 Obstruct Police
- 2 Yelling

As noted, planning for the students return and Homecoming this year presented unique challenges for all community partners, but especially for the Kingston Police. With this year marking a return to in-person learning, and with that the opportunity to engage in large gatherings, street and house parties, an unmistakable desire was evident in the student population to let off the pent up energy that resulted in several months of COVID-19 pandemic lock down restrictions. All indications from online activity, in-person conversations with students, and consultations with the Queen's Alma Mater Society, Queen's Security, the Kingston Police Association, and the ongoing assessment of the unprecedented aggressive, confrontational, and volatile behavior displayed by the revelers caused us great concern. Historically, Kingston has seen unsanctioned street and house parties associated to the annual Queen's University Homecoming go through ebbs and flows, with many years becoming quite tumultuous. This year had all the ingredients for an extreme year, and in order to assess the necessary policing needs, we held conversations with Police Public Order Unit subject matter experts who have considerable experience in crowd management; including

being present at other university homecoming celebrations this year. Assessing all the available information and input, it became clear very early on that it was necessary for the Kingston Police to secure considerable outside, specially trained, police resources to first help maintain public order, and then be able to restore it should situations become disorderly or riotous. This year we utilized the expertise of public order units from, Durham Region, York Region, the Ontario Provincial Police, and Toronto. Additionally we secured a contingent of the Toronto Police Mounted Unit and their Cyber Intelligence Unit. We also brought in a small number of officers from our neighboring police services to help.

Providing a necessary and measured police response since student move-in throughout the end of October put considerable strain on all of our staff (a load most carried by our sworn personnel). They have worked many long and hard hours, often on overtime, providing an appropriate police response in very difficult circumstances. They are to be commended and thanked for their extreme commitment and professionalism. The mission of our operational plan was, in part “ ***to provide a safe environment for all persons present during the Queen’s Homecoming weekend. The safe and secure environment for the citizens of Kingston and officers involved is of paramount consideration...***” We were successful in achieving this goal without any major complications and community support for our response remains positive. We have been recognized by our many policing and community partners for the successful execution of a very involved, resource heavy, and logistically complicated operation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Funnell', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Funnell
Inspector #240