

City joins task force in hopes of controlling policing costs

By [W. Brice McVicar](#), Belleville Intelligencer

Monday, May 14, 2012 7:02:54 EDT PM



Coun. Taso Christopher

Belleville will lend its voice to a municipal coalition tasked with examining the increasing cost of policing in Ontario.

City council approved spending \$1,000 to join the Mayors' Coalition for Affordable, Sustainable, Accountable Policing with the hope being the collective voice will be able to get the provincial government to improve the transparency and accountability of policing costs. While the coalition is geared predominantly toward municipalities with Ontario Provincial Police contracts, the cost for municipal forces - such as Belleville - play a role in the debate.

Coun. Taso Christopher told council he attended a session at the recent Ontario Small Urban Municipalities conference where policing costs were discussed. It was there, he said, that the coalition said it hopes to strike a partnership with the province or have the government take full responsibility for the taxation of OPP policing costs.

Municipal forces may fall under a different bracket, he said, but it all trickles down. If OPP contracts call for higher wages, it means municipal forces will soon look for the same reimbursement.

"Instead of being just another committee or coalition, they're going to hire somebody to focus on policing costs across the province," Christopher said.

Coun. Jackie Denyes agreed.

She too noted Belleville may not be policed by OPP, but contracts and arbitration all follows suit.

"We need to stand up for the bottom line," she said.

Mayor Neil Ellis said though he had initially turned down a request to join the coalition because of the OPP-heavy focus, the coalition continued to ask the city to join. Again, like other members of council, Ellis said costs between both the provincial force and municipal forces are linked.

The information was presented quickly to councillors during Monday's session and Coun. Egerton Boyce said he would prefer more time before making a decision. He requested a deferral on the matter.

"I'd feel more comfortable if I was given two weeks to figure out what this is all about," Boyce said.

His motion to defer, however, failed to find support.

Following Monday's meeting, Christopher said rising police costs are a concern to all municipalities, regardless of whether it is a provincial or municipal force holding the contract.

"It's driven by the larger centres. Whatever the OPP get, the municipal law enforcement officers want the same thing ... so this is an opportunity for the mayor to be at that table and look at the escalating costs of policing," he said.

Belleville's policing costs are nearly \$14 million annually, he added, and it is prudent for elected officials to be looking at those numbers. He pointed to the provincial 'Sunshine List' which lists public sector employees making \$100,000 or more and noted there were more than 20 police officers from Belleville included on that list.