

■ **2010 BUDGET:** London police Chief Murray Faulkner has promised to do his best to meet city council's concerns about keeping London's police budget as tight as possible

Police costs council target

JOE BELANGER

The London Free Press

The annual battle over London police spending will be renewed today when the police services board unveils its 2010 budget.

The budget sparked controversy earlier this year when city council set a target of a 3% hike, less than half the 6.4% police said they would need in a 2008 forecast.

That early forecast was reduced

to 5.5% this year, but council ignored Chief Murray Faulkner's warning that a 3% target would lead to staff cuts, including front line officers after successive year's of hiring more than 135 new officers.

Faulkner declined to reveal specific numbers, but said cuts have been made to try to appease the public and council, which faces a tight budget because of the economic downturn that's slowed growth and swelled welfare rolls.

"We don't live in a vacuum, we live in the community, and we know many people are unemployed and emergency services have a big impact on taxes," Faulkner said.

"We have great support from the community, the taxpayers, and that's always very reassuring, but we also know we just can't keep asking and asking for more. We're going to try and do our share to get the numbers

down. But there's not a lot more room."

In addition to dealing with the increased wages owed to officers hired the last few years as they gain experience, there are employee contract obligations to meet, not to mention a police headquarters expansion that will begin taxing and adding to the budget.

Since 2002, the police budget has ballooned to \$76.7 million from \$48 million. It has become

an annual target of some councillors looking for ways to cut costs and ease the burden on taxpayers and threat of cuts to other services, especially for next year, an election year.

The budget soared after a 2001 workforce audit showed the city needed about 135 new officers to meet the demands of new legislation, laws and growth. The new hires were phased in over several years, while additional officers were brought on with funding

from the provincial and federal governments.

Faulkner said the budget includes no new hires, but the front line, uniformed division will be bolstered by the addition of 35 officers reassigned from various specialty units. As well, Faulkner said, plans are under way to install a new shift system, which could also help ease the pressure for frontline officers.

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MIDDLESEX

Murray to guide county growth

Laura Schober
Special to Sun Media

Middlesex County's first full-blown economic development manager comes from just a short hop away, but is packing 25 years' experience.

Aileen Murray, formerly director of economic services for Chatham-Kent, will start her new job with the county Oct. 26. Her appointment was announced at county council yesterday.

"We are extremely pleased with it and we look forward to Aileen moving forward our county views, with respect to our economic development," said Middlesex Warden Jim Maudsley. "She brings a wealth of experience and a well-rounded economical personality to the position."

Murray has worked in economic development for a quarter century, and now serves as president on the Board of Economic Developers' Council of Ontario.

Until now, planning and economic development had come under one department at the county. The creation of a full-time economic development manager represents a change in approach.

Council last year approved the new position, said Bill Rayburn, Middlesex chief administrative officer.

"It was created as part of our economic development strategic plan. We realized that having it mixed in with planning was not necessarily the best for economic development, and there are some gaps in the delivery of economic development that now exist," he said.

Rayburn said resource-based businesses, such as agriculture, were previously neglected in economic development.

He's optimistic the new position will improve the work that the county's Community Futures Development Corp. is doing together with local municipalities.

"She's been working in the field a long time and she brings those contacts that will help us in our growth as a economic development department," Rayburn said.

Steve Evans, now the county's director of planning and economic development, will become manager of the planning department for a three-year term, Rayburn said.

WHILE WE'RE HERE ...



SUSAN BRADNAM susan.bradnam@sunmedia.ca

It looks like an impromptu coffee clutch as some London firefighters gather in the drive-through lane of the Starbucks at Hyde Park Rd. and Oxford St. yesterday. The reason for the emergency rendezvous? Complaints of natural gas fumes. The firefighters left after a repair worker arrived.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Health unit gets 10 calls about E. coli alert

KELLY PEDRO
The London Free Press

Fewer than 10 people have called the Middlesex-London health unit one day after health officials said four people who were at the Western Fair contracted E. coli.

Some of those calls were from people offering suggestions into how someone may have become ill, others from people with questions and some were "of interest," said Cathie Walker, the health unit's manager of infectious disease control.

"We're following up with them to arrange testing," she said.

Health officials are not any

closer to pinpointing how the four people got E. coli — spread when someone touches fecal matter and then their mouth, ingests infected food, drinking water or breathing in air — except that they had all visited the Agriplex.

"There are several ways people can pick up E. coli and we're not sure where it was," said Walker. "It may not even have been the Western Fair. It's always been a hypothesis, but it's not been proven conclusively."

Walker said the health unit wants anyone who was at the fair between Sept. 11 and 20 and who fell ill to follow up with their doctor and contact the unit if they experienced severe or bloody

diarrhea.

She said Western Fair has been co-operating with the health unit.

"They're as interested in sorting it out as we are," said Walker.

Fair spokesperson Heather Blackwell said all the animals in the Agriplex were inspected by the London Humane Society and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency before the fair opened. The health unit also inspected the Agriplex and the fair hired professional caregivers for each group of animals.

Two veterinary services were also on hand, said Blackwell, adding there were no issues with any of the animals at the fair this

year.

There were also 14 hand sanitizers and three hot water hand washing stations at the Agriplex, both with written and visual signs telling people to wash their hands if they had touched the animals.

Blackwell said it's too early to say what the fair would do in future due to E. coli illnesses, since the health unit hasn't yet found a source.

"We need them to identify the source and once that's complete we'd get together and work with the recommendations that they submit to us to follow," she said.

The potentially deadly bacteria — found in animal waste, among

other places — has infected four people between ages seven and 71. Walker couldn't say whether those infected have fully recovered. It's also unknown if they were related.

Two London cases and another from a neighbouring health unit have been confirmed as the same deadly strain that killed people through contaminated water in Walkerton in 2000 and the same strain that infected 160 people with the intestinal illness after they'd visited a Western Fair petting zoo 10 years ago.

A fourth case hasn't been confirmed as the same strain.

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