

Can't 'arrest crime away,' says Winnipeg police chief Devon Clunis

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Winnipeg police chief Devon Clunis speaks before the Building Owners and Managers of Manitoba during a luncheon at the Delta Hotel on Wed., April 10, 2013 in Winnipeg, Man. Kevin King/Winnipeg Sun/QMI Agency)

Winnipeg police chief Devon Clunis told a gathering of the city's commercial real estate community that, with the right commitments, Winnipeg could shed its infamous moniker as murder capital of Canada in the next five to 10 years.

Clunis, speaking to the Building Owners and Managers Association of Manitoba, said you cannot simply "arrest crime away" and spoke of the city needing a determination to focus on a "social responsibility."

He said there has been no addition of officers to the force, but rather a shifting of responsibility.

"We're putting more officers out, more officers on the beat," Clunis said. "We're doing all that we can in terms of police service, but I really believe we need to look at the greater social issues which are impacting our city."

Clunis said focusing on the social catalysts of crime is something that requires attention.

"I don't believe we've placed enough emphasis in the past (on that) because we've been responding to the crime," he said. "If that's all we do going forward then we'll still be responding to the crime. It won't stop the outflow."

Clunis said he's had discussions with both the city and province and said "we're all on the same page at this time."

"Some of these (solutions) will require funding, but a lot of what we can do doesn't necessarily require additional funds," he said. "It's raising the social consciousness of our community ... everyone coming on board and saying 'What do I have to offer?'"

BOMA-Manitoba executive director Tom Thiessen said one of the greatest concerns among his members is downtown safety.

"On our wish list for downtown is a greater security, certainly, of the downtown skywalk area," Thiessen said. "We need that area to be secure, we need that area to be safe for not only office workers but all the office visitors and retail visitors. ... Our members certainly see some of the positive things that are going on downtown with cadets, and we want to see more of it."

Clunis said he will await the results of an ongoing operational review before he makes any proclamations.

"For me to go out and make significant changes would be a little bit imprudent," he said. "The review will hopefully be wrapped up in two or so months, then I can make decisions that will hopefully be in line with that review. Then we can set our targets."

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