



BUDDING ARTISTS LEARN THEIR CRAFT



Grade 5 students, from left, Anna Zelaya, Sol Shin and Alicia Lau work on self-portraits at Quadra Elementary School in a workshop sponsored by artsREACH. The new program is devoted to delivering visual and performing arts training to young people in the capital region, regardless of their financial means.

John McKay/Times Colonist

Councillors mull rising police costs

Budget proposal would put six new officers on patrol

BY BILL CLEVERLEY
Times Colonist staff

Victoria and Esquimalt councillors got their first look at a policing budget Tuesday that calls for an additional \$2 million in spending and would bring another six police officers onto city streets.

The \$30.7-million budget, which is mostly comprised of salary, benefit and overtime costs, would translate into a 2.2 per cent property tax increase for homeowners in Victoria and Esquimalt — taxpayers who pay the price for being party-central for the entire region.

Victoria/Esquimalt police carry a far higher case load than officers in neighbouring municipalities and fully half of the people arrested in Victoria and Esquimalt don't live in the core. That translates into a per-capita policing cost of \$313, compared to the provincial average of \$244 or the capital region average of \$230.

Victoria Mayor Alan Lowe and Esquimalt Mayor Chris Clement saw the costs as the price of doing business.

"Most of the budget is salary orientated, so if we want to reduce the budget we have to reduce the number of officers,"

The budget figures presented to the councils by police department controller Scott Seivewright don't leave much wriggle room for councillors looking to pare down the numbers in coming months.

Personnel costs include: an estimated salary increase of three per cent for officers (estimated at \$645,582); hiring six officers approved in 2005 but deferred to this year to save money (estimated at \$416,000); increased benefits (\$423,000); increased overtime (\$180,000); an increased CUPE salary cost of \$94,250 and other costs of \$18,168 make up \$1.7 million of the increase.

The budget also proposed increasing the capital reserves by \$80,000, to \$913,000 from \$835,000.

The bulk of the capital spending is to replace 11 police vehicles, Seivewright said.

The increased costs are offset by a projected \$327,000 increase in traffic fine revenue and an additional \$30,000 in fees for doing criminal record checks.

Lowe said one option for lowering the increase might be to further delay hiring some of the approved six new officers and bridge the hiring over two years. But he believes taxpayers support police spending.

"I think taxpayers believe that safety is very important and if we look at bringing more officers on the street, if we look at protecting their properties, I think the public will be very supportive of it. We do, however, have to balance it out to see



Alan Lowe: public will back increased police presence