

Vancouver police board backs regional model as more effective, efficient

BY LORI CULBERT, VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 20, 2013

Metro Vancouver would be better served by a regional police force, the Vancouver police board agreed Tuesday, embracing a key recommendation of Wally Oppal's Missing Women Commission of Inquiry report.

"The board supports a regional policing model as a more effective and efficient way to deliver policing services in the Lower Mainland," says a report by board member Wade Grant, which was passed unanimously at Tuesday's police board meeting.

Board members also endorsed Oppal's suggestion that the proposed oversight body for a future Greater Vancouver police force put a top priority on communicating well with residents.

Oppal's critical report said the Vancouver police board did a poor job of receiving input from the community and acting on it between 1997 and 2002.

During those five years, dozens of women involved in the sex trade disappeared from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and their families complained of poor treatment by police when trying to make missing persons reports.

Port Coquitlam pig farmer Robert Pickton was arrested in 2002, and eventually charged with killing 26 of those women. He was convicted in 2007 of killing six women.

There were 65 recommendations in Oppal's hefty report, four of them directed at police boards.

Oppal suggested that to make boards independent of municipal and provincial politics, mayors no longer serve as their chairs, but instead become nonvoting members.

It is a recommendation that Oppal, a former Appeal Court justice, first made in 1994 in an earlier report on policing, and it was echoed in a recent study of police boards by B.C.'s Justice Institute.

The Vancouver board recognizes "the inherent conflict" of having the mayor as chair, Grant's report said, but also noted it provides a "valuable link" with the city.

The board stopped short of taking a position, instead suggesting further discussion on the topic.

Grant's report backed Oppal's recommendation that more native people and marginalized citizens sit on police boards, but argued this can't be achieved "to the level desired" without expanding the board. Right now it consists of six citizens plus the chair.

Grant's report also endorsed Oppal's call for boards to receive more provincial funding to better gather and analyze their own information, so they are less reliant on the police forces they are overseeing.

Five cities in Metro Vancouver - Vancouver, Delta, New Westminister, West Vancouver and Port Moody - have municipal police forces. The rest are served by the RCMP.

The West Vancouver police department has come out against a regional police force, but the police board plans to discuss Oppal's other recommendations at its next meeting Feb. 28.

Delta's police chief and mayor said last month they opposed regionalized policing, arguing it only benefits major cities, not small ones.

They expressed support, though, for the "bulk" of Oppal's other recommendations.

Vancouver police Chief Jim Chu said in a report last month that his department would endorse all policing-related recommendations made by Oppal, including the creation of a regional police force.

Oppal's report, released in December, came more than two years after an \$8-million inquiry was struck to examine the missing women case, and more than a decade since Pick-ton's arrest.

The former attorney general was very critical of the VPD and RCMP, noting "there was systemic bias by the police in the missing women investigation ... They (the missing women) did not receive equal treatment from police. As a group they were dismissed."

lculbert@vancouversun.com

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