

B.C. solicitor general defends ability to overrule Esquimalt on police budget

[Katie DeRosa](#) , Bill Cleverley / Times Colonist

FEBRUARY 28, 2019 11:39 AM



Solicitor General Mike Farnworth

B.C.'s solicitor general defended the province's ability to overrule the Township of Esquimalt over the hiring of six new police officers, saying if "kids" can't play nice, "dad" has to step in.

"What it is, there is an agreement with a mechanism to resolve disputes when the two parties at the table can't agree and that's exactly what's taken place," Solicitor General Mike Farnworth told reporters Thursday. "In a nutshell, you can say that sometimes the kids can't play in the sandbox, and dad has to come in and say 'This is how it's going to be.'"

After a nearly year-long review, the province's Police Services Division ordered Victoria and Esquimalt to hire the six Victoria police officers. The province was asked to weigh in when councillors for Esquimalt, which covers about 15 per cent of Victoria Police Department costs, voted 4-3 last year against spending \$40,778 for Esquimalt's share of the cost of hiring the additional officers. Victoria councillors voted in favour of spending \$528,000 for the six officers. Because both municipalities must approve the police budget, the officers were not hired.

The decision does not set a precedent that the province will overrule municipal decisions, Farnworth insisted, saying the agreement around policing is specific to Victoria and Esquimalt.

"There is a joint agreement between Victoria and Esquimalt when it comes to policing. And any time there's a joint partnership or agreement, there needs to be a mechanism to resolve disputes," Farnworth said. "And in this case you had a dispute about how many police to hire and because there couldn't be an agreement that means it comes into my ministry to use the mechanisms that are in the agreement to resolve the dispute. That's what took place and that's done by my director of police services."

The 10-year agreement has been in place between Esquimalt, Victoria and the police department since 2014. The agreement ensures Esquimalt receives dedicated coverage from the Victoria Police Department and laid out a funding formula after Esquimalt threatened to ditch VicPD and contract out to the RCMP instead.

The province overruled Esquimalt on that as well and a mediator stepped in to help the parties work together.

Simon Fraser University criminologist Rob Gordon said it's curious that the province used a heavy hand with Esquimalt while being cautiously hands-off when it comes to Surrey Mayor Doug McCallum's bid to replace the RCMP with a municipal police force.

"It's a game of tippy-toe in Surrey and a clashing of antlers in Esquimalt," Gordon said.

Gordon wondered whether the province's strong response to the disagreement between Esquimalt and Victoria could be a "dress rehearsal for what the province wants to do in Surrey."

When the six new jobs weren't approved, Police Chief Del Manak responded by redeploying all three school liaison officers, one intelligence officer, one reserve constable and one community services officer to patrol duty.

Tonia Enger, acting director of the Police Services Division said in a letter to Esquimalt Mayor Barb Desjardins and Victoria Mayor Lisa Helps, who co-chair the police board that the officers are a "necessity."

Enger added a condition that when the six officers are deployed, there must be an allocation to meet Esquimalt's needs "without regard to the demands driven by the downtown core and to ensure consistency with the Framework Agreement."

Desjardins said she was disappointed with the decision, but happy that Enger ensured some of the new resources will be dedicated to Esquimalt.

The decision is not subject to appeal.

kderosa@timescolonist.com

bcleverley@timescolonist.com

© 2019 Copyright Times Colonist