



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: (Sept 10, 2019)

Province seems tone deaf to municipalities' openness for regional policing

Why is BC Public Safety and Solicitor General Mike Farnworth not acting on local municipalities' openness for consideration of a regional police service?

In his recent letter to the City of Victoria, Minister Farnworth wrote:

*"Integration or **regionalization has the potential to benefit the delivery of policing and law enforcement** in a community. This **government continues to be supportive of integration and regionalization** where appropriate and has assisted communities in working with police agencies to achieve this objective. However, any change to policing and law enforcement in the Capital Region is a decision for the municipalities involved and their elected officials, subject to my overall responsibility to ensure adequate and effective policing and public safety in BC."* (bolding added)

His response acknowledges the potential benefits of regional policing, yet fails to commit to any action. The response is puzzling. It ignores the fact that provincial involvement is a legal requirement in any change impacting municipalities. He correctly states that local governments must signal a need for change, but haven't they done so?

Interests have been expressed by other municipalities, such as Esquimalt¹, and Saanich² (de facto including the criminal investigations for Oak Bay) when it supported the regional police service recommended by its own citizens' governance advisory group. Together, these municipalities (pop. 236,000) form the major urban core of Greater Victoria.

What is the missing ingredient to compel the provincial government to act?

The Province showed no such reticence when forcing the consolidation of Esquimalt police with Victoria in 2002. And again in 2011, when Esquimalt opted to contract with the RCMP it was overruled by the Province.

There have been numerous past calls for a regional policing from various officials, including former Attorney General Wally Oppal³, the BC Coroner⁴, MLAs, current and former Victoria police chiefs, Darryl Plecas (as Professor of Criminology at the University of the Fraser Valley⁵) and the former head of the Police Chiefs' Association of Canada, among others.

Fragmented police services in dense urban areas lack the ability to fairly prioritize and allocate resources. This model of policing places a disproportionate burden on two core municipalities. It denies the opportunity for specialized officers to tackle common urban issues and to meet public safety needs, e.g. cyber crime, forensic identification, canine units, prolific offenders, etc. Residents deserve timely protection that has no jurisdiction barriers.

Earlier this year the Westshore communities jointly submitted an application to Province for increased police, confirming this is a regional crisis, not just a City of Victoria issue.

Will the Province ignore them all, leaving policing up to local officials in the fallacious belief that they will co-ordinate their needs?

Region policing works, as evidenced by the many successful models elsewhere in Canada, e.g. York, Peel, Waterloo, Durham. Niagara, Halton, Durham, etc.

Although there has been some progress locally (i.e. the creation of the common radio dispatch, the implementation of a 911 regional police dispatch centre, and a common provincial records management system), the major piece is still missing.

Amalgamation Yes calls on Minister Farnworth to facilitate the final step and honour the community interests for a regional police service.

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¹Victoria and Esquimalt Policing Study, pg. 32

https://www.esquimalt.ca/sites/default/files/meetings/2012_07_09_council_agenda_special.pdf

²Saanich Council Minutes, January 8, 2018, pg. 10, http://saanich.ca.granicus.com/DocumentViewer.php?file=saanich_7872e1553270a95892fe6ffe26568ebe.pdf&view=1

³*Closing the Gap, Policing and the Community*, Justice Wally Oppal https://opcc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Closing_The_Gap-Recommendations.pdf, pg. 27, items 39 & 40. See also Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Women,

⁴ *Verdict on Coroners' Inquest, Chun, Lee, Park deaths* <https://www.cbc.ca/bc/news/bc-091218-peter-lee-inquest-recommendations.pdf>

⁵A regional police service is a "no brainer", *Setting the Stage for Improved Efficiency and Effectiveness*, A Review of Victoria Police Dept. Operations, summary pages 42-43.

<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/lbrr/archives/cnmcs-plcng/cn31658-eng.pdf>