

OIPRD to hold public meeting in Thunder Bay, Ont.

Meeting part of ongoing investigation into allegations of systemic racism in Thunder Bay police

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Gerry McNeilly, Ontario Independent Police Review director, is heading up an investigation into allegations of systemic racism in Thunder Bay's police force. (Cathy Alex/CBC)

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The Office of the Independent Police Review Director (OIPRD) will hold a public meeting in Thunder Bay, Ont., this month as part of the ongoing investigation into allegations of systemic racism in the city's police force.

"I'm inviting perspectives, suggestions, guidance from the public, so that I can get a better understanding of the community relations and their interactions with the Thunder Bay police," review director Gerry McNeilly told CBC on Monday.

"I'm hoping to be able to hear from the general public, the grassroots," he said. "I'm hoping that they will have an open discussion with me, bring me suggestions, bring me comments and recommendations as to how to improve the relationship between the community and the police whose role is to serve the community."

The public meeting is scheduled for Monday, Sept. 25 from 7-9 p.m. in the Da Vinci Centre's Marco Polo room.

Police-Indigenous relations a focus

The review of the Thunder Bay police force was launched in November 2016, and is examining the "policies, practices and attitudes of the Thunder Bay Police Service as they relate to Indigenous death and missing person investigations."

The media release states the public consultation will focus on three main areas:

- Police-Indigenous – Community relations: perceptions, realities and recommendations
- Racism and bias in policing: reflections of the community
- Effective policing: successes, barriers and recommendations

More than two-dozen visits to Thunder Bay

McNeilly said individual stories from members of the public will be "extremely helpful," but he also wants to hear about perceptions of police in the community.

"We will also invite people if they wish to speak with us privately, individually, collectively," he said. "I want to hear as much as possible from the people in Thunder Bay, because these issues affect all the people in Thunder Bay."

The public meeting will be the latest in almost two-dozen visits to Thunder Bay McNeilly and his team have made since the review launched.

During those visits, they've met with individuals, First Nation leaders and community members, Indigenous organizations, community and service organizations, as well as members of the Thunder Bay Police Service and Thunder Bay Police Services Board.

"Our meetings have provided valuable information and insight from a range of perspectives," McNeilly said. "I invite the residents of Thunder Bay to provide input that will add to our understanding and our ability to provide meaningful recommendations for improvement."

Wide-ranging review

The review is examining a number of concerns over how police handle Indigenous investigations in the city, including:

- Whether the Indigenous population is over-policed or under-policed

- Whether missing persons and death investigations involving Indigenous Peoples are conducted in discriminatory ways
- Adequacy of training and education provided to officers and supervisors
- And the extent to which the service communicates with Indigenous family members, communities and their leaders, and engages in community outreach or has specialized liaison units.