

Chair D. Deans' Verbal Report, OPSB Meeting February 22, 2021

I have three matters I want to discuss as part of my verbal report today.

Black History Month Award

I want to take a moment to congratulate the Board on the acceptance of the *Every Child is Sacred's Safe, Child Friendly Community Building Recognition* from Black History Ottawa.

As many listening will know, we unanimously passed a motion last year recognizing the UN's International Decade for People of African Descent.

The decade was proclaimed by the United Nations and shows our commitment to taking action to promote respect, encourage greater knowledge of diverse cultures and heritages, and recognize the immense contributions these communities have made to our society.

We cannot look forward without these acknowledgements.

The Ottawa Police Services Board has taken on an immense amount of work aimed at improving the diversity of our service.

All of this work will continue to be informed by the overall intent of the UN's declaration; that People of African Decent have been marginalized for too long within our systems and our society and it is our responsibility to create that change.

I would like to once again thank June Girvan for her commitment to our City and look forward to continuing this work.

St. Laurent Incident

I would now like to address the incident outside the St. Laurent Mall from December 27. At our January 25 in-camera meeting, the Board received a briefing from the Service on this incident.

The Board satisfied itself that the call for service was handled reasonably and responsibly by the OPS.

We have since asked the Chief to provide a summary of the call as part of his verbal report this evening, for the benefit of the public.

The Board felt there was misinformation circulating about what occurred that day and it was important to correct these disparities, as they have a significant impact on public trust.

Workplace Sexual Violence and Harassment at the OPS

Finally, the last matter I wish to talk about is workplace sexual violence and harassment within the OPS.

I would like to provide an update on our efforts to address it.

When I became Chair of this Board and Peter Sloly became Chief, together, we quickly concluded that there was a toxic culture inside this organization that would need both our attention and determination to change.

We also recognized that we needed help – both internally and externally.

Like many of you, I've seen the deeply disturbing reports about women and men who have been subjected to acts of workplace harassment and violence within our service. Let me be clear – this type of behaviour should never be tolerated. That is a message we need to send loud and clear.

We also need the help of the Justice system to ensure that penalties, not plea bargains, are imposed.

It takes incredible courage for a person to come forward and share their story. I want to recognize that bravery here today and encourage anyone else who feels they have been the victim of violence or harassment to come forward.

For too long an environment has existed where victims have not felt safe enough to speak out. This must change.

It is also important to recognize this issue is not unique to our community or our service, there is a culture of sexism that pervades policing. It has gone on far too long. This is also something we are seized with addressing.

As you know, we initiated a comprehensive Workplace Sexual Violence and Harassment project in April 2020. Our focus is on improving how the OPS handles these issues, from enhanced reporting mechanisms for victims to greater education for members. We want the OPS to be a safe workplace, where members feel secure in reporting any incidents and where victims are provided the support they need.

I cannot stress enough how much time and effort has gone into this program and the strides that have already been made.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the everyone who have been instrumental in achieving progress on this project.

In September 2020, Police Chief Peter Sloly and I also announced the engagement of Janice Rubin, a leading Canadian expert on workplace sexual violence and harassment.

Since September, she has acted as an independent third-party advisor to enhance and support our ongoing work. Furthermore, her firm is serving as an independent third party for intake, investigations and resolutions for all forms of harassment. While her

services are rendered by the Board, her duty is to help drive change with the highest integrity, as she has successfully done with public mandates across the country. While these initiatives are helping to drive change within the OPS, changes to provincial legislation are also needed in order to give us the ability to punish those who are found guilty of workplace sexual violence and harassment.

In September 2020, I spoke about our need to issue harsher penalties for those committing egregious acts and set a new tone that clearly demonstrates that offenders will no longer be tolerated in our workplace.

That is why both Ottawa City Council and this Board formally requested the Ontario government to give police chiefs or police services boards the ability to fire with cause or suspend the pay of officers who've been charged or convicted of serious crimes.

Let me be perfectly clear. Currently there is no option. We are asking the Province to give us one.

We are battling deeply systemic and pervasive issues that have long been entrenched in the institution of policing and cannot be resolved overnight. I know from experience that change is never easy, even when it is what is needed most. That is why it is so vital we continue our progress.

I want you to know I am absolutely committed to seeing this through. Let's work together to create a safe workplace for everyone, the kind of workplace in which we can all be proud.

I would like to ask Chief Sloly if he would like to comment on this matter as part of his verbal, and provide an update on the Workplace Sexual Violence and Harassment project.

Chief Sloly has been working to make positive changes at the OPS, and he has the full confidence of the Board.