

TPS Board Submission

Stephen Tanny

I welcome the opportunity to provide this input to the TPS Board. In doing so I express some very strongly held feelings that I am grateful for the opportunity to share.

For some time, and especially over the past 10 months, Toronto has become a much less comfortable and safe place for all its citizens, and especially for Jews and Jewish institutions. Demonstrations have clogged streets, snarling both vehicular and pedestrian traffic, creating significant noise and costing local business lost sales.

Many of these demonstrations targeted Jews, businesses associated with Jews, Jewish institutions and Jewish neighbourhoods. And very frequently the demonstrators carried banners and used anti-Semitic language that bordered on or crossed the threshold of hate speech. All of this was clearly designed to make all of those targeted highly uncomfortable and even fearful for their well-being and safety.

The officers of the TPS are to be commended for their efforts to control demonstrations, protests and occupations in Toronto under very challenging circumstances. Theirs is not an easy task and generally they execute these duties very effectively considering the constraints within which they currently operate.

But therein lays the challenge. How do we ease these constraints so that our streets and neighbourhoods can feel safer and less threatened and our City can function the way it should?

TPS needs more resources to enforce our existing laws: Freedom of assembly and freedom of expression do not give protesters unlimited rights. In particular, our laws make clear that the expression of these rights must not unreasonably impinge upon the freedoms and rights of others.

It is against the law to block public roads and create havoc with traffic. This has to stop. We need more officers to appear at demonstrations much earlier to ensure that demonstrators are prevented from blocking streets and entrances to buildings. TPS officers may need better training and a wider array of strategies for crowd control.

TPS officers need to know more about hate speech and calls for violence: Hate speech is a criminal offence. Calling for violence against people or property is a criminal offence. Officers at demonstrations require more training to recognize symbols and speech that cross the boundary into these areas, together with direction from senior TPS personnel regarding how to respond in these situations.

Let's provide TPS with sufficient tools and support to maintain the peace, safety and efficient functioning of our city.