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Crime-fighting czar appointed

31-year veteran police officer to lead 46-member anti-violence team

By AMY PUGSLEY FRASER City Hall Reporter

Halifax's first-ever public safety officer says he isn't fazed by the prospect of responding to the city's far-reaching report on violence.

"It's a large task, no question, Supt. Don Spicer said Wednesday at a Halifax city hall ceremony. "But they didn't create one person to solve all of those problems or deal with all of those initiatives.

As the head of the city's new public safety office, the 31-year Halifax Regional Police veteran said he will act as a co-ordinator "who will make sure it all gets done.

Mayor Peter Kelly said Supt. Spicer was a "perfect fit for the job, thanks to his background as a Gottingen Street beat cop, his work in community relations and crime prevention, his tenure as a media spokesman and his role as a divisional commander.

The province gave Halifax Regional Municipality a \$100,000 grant to help create Supt. Spicer's job.

He will have 32 police officers and 14 civilians and volunteers working for him. The \$3.2 million needed to fund his office will be taken from existing municipal departments.

A comprehensive 2008 study on violence in Halifax recommended that the city hire a public safety officer.

Halifax criminologist Don Clairmont prepared the report after Mr. Kelly convened a roundtable on violence in 2007 following the stabbing death of a 28-year-old American sailor outside a downtown bar.

The \$68,000 report showed "overwhelming evidence of a "serious problem of violence and public safety in Halifax.

As a result, Mr. Clairmont made 64 recommendations that ranged from strengthening race relations in the city to creating a volunteer group of university students to deal with their own security issues.

As Supt. Spicer faces his first day at his new Mellor Avenue office in Dartmouth, he said he plans to address the report's recommendations from many angles.

"In reality, there could be 10 to 20 of those recommendations all being worked on simultaneously.

Supt. Spicer told those gathered at the Argyle Street ceremony that the city's crime problem won't solved quickly.

"We didn't get where we are overnight, he told municipal politicians and members of Halifax Regional Police. "We'd be naive to think that we're going to get where we want to be quickly.

Many at Wednesday's ceremony pointed out that crime rates have been falling in Halifax in each of the last four years.

But Justice Minister Cecil Clarke said people still want to "feel safer at home and on their streets.

The province has already contributed \$7 million toward hiring 50 new officers for Halifax.

"There's work to be done and I'm very encouraged that we're getting on with that work, Mr. Clarke said.

Mr. Kelly said Halifax residents want safer communities.

Public safety will be one of council's budget priorities, he said.

"The public made it very clear: They want safer communities. And they want us to respond to the need for safer communities.

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