

Cops allowing people to die anonymously

His name was Gurvinder Singh. The 22-year-old Toronto man was brutally assaulted with a compressed air hose in 2015 at his Mississauga workplace and died in hospital 12 days later.

Three of Singh's coworkers, Abhijeet Singh Nagra, Dilsher Singh and Prabhjeet Singh, were charged with manslaughter.

But the police never told the public his name. Peel Regional Police kept it secret at the request of his family.

Police are not going to release the victim's name, nor would we confirm the victim's name should it be released by anyone, said Const. Thomas Ruttan at the time.

The Toronto Star was able to confirm the identity through publicly accessible court records. The case underscores the differences between the practices of police forces nationwide. Toronto and Vancouver, for example, always release the victim's name; both forces say their practice is in the public interest.

Halton police and the OPP, on the other hand, often do not.

The varying approaches have pitted transparency advocates against privacy experts. The former argue the identity of a homicide victim is critical to the public's understanding of a crime, while the latter that respect for the family's wishes comes first.

We believe you can't be murdered anonymously, that the public has a right to know some of the details around a homicide, said Vancouver police spokesman Const. Brian Montague.

While we do the best we can to respect the family's wishes, we try to help them understand why we would release information, because you want to be seen as transparent with your information. As a police department, you don't want to be seen as trying to hide a homicide in your city.

Toronto police spokesman Mark Pugash said the force believes there is a compelling public interest in the victims of what is the most serious crime that we investigate.

He added police work closely with the families, and that while some have expressed concern about disclosure, he said they ultimately agree when police explain that it's important for the investigation. Like Toronto, Halton police and the OPP must take the time and compassion to explain why disclosure is important.

No one should die tragically and be recorded as a statistic.

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Letters to the editor

Failure to communicate

It is important to remember that elected officials represent their local community and are accountable to their constituents. Their legitimacy comes from the consent of those they govern.

On Jan. 24, 2017, The Town of Halton Hills approved, in a special meeting, a 31-home subdivision in one of the last remaining green spaces in the Hamlet of Glen Williams.

Before an overflow crowd in the Chambers, several Glen Williams residents raised their deep reservations about the development. They highlighted the plan did not meet the intent and spirit of the official town plan of the hamlet; it offered zero parkland to a community that was to lose 20 acres of greenspace. Concerns were raised with respect to the proposed storm-water system and the extensive use of retain-

ing walls on private lots.

Taking the opposite view, town staff and lawyers (from the town and from the developer, Eden Oak) said that the current proposal was the best achievable outcome as the application was now before the Ontario Municipal Board (OMB) and that town council had no alternative but to approve it.

It is difficult to actually know whether this positive recommendation of the town and its solicitor is correct.

The town's final report and recommendations were released on Thursday Jan. 19, 2017. This meant four days for the public and councillors to locate, read and respond to a complex report (over 100 pages) and one day for registration for anyone wishing to comment for five minutes at the meeting. There was no debate.

The town solicitor and town staff still need to resolve 99 outstanding issues without further input from council, the public or independent experts.

Only one official public meeting was

held about this property and the proposed development in 2009 but this was not about the revised plan that planning staff (and the town solicitor) were now recommending.

That is seven years of silence and four days of frenetic activity.

The Town of Halton Hills is responsible for planning applications and has a public duty to adequately inform the residents of Glen Williams about a plan that will forever impact the Glen's special topography and sense of community.

The town staff and councillors should acknowledge that the Glen community could assist in many of the unresolved issues which concern the proposed development and their neighborhood. The Glen Williams Community Association would be happy to collaborate with the town in initiating their public information and consultation process. Let's get this right.

Drew Leverette, President

Glen Williams Community Association