

POLICE: Open approach the new wave to solving problems, chief says

Listening to the public

BY RICK VANDERLINDE
Staff Writer

York Regional Police Chief Julian Fantino will come face to face with the public in a series of town hall meetings across the region.

Fantino's Town Hall Forum starts in Aurora next Wednesday and ends in Markham on Nov. 25.

The chief is billing the public meetings as a chance to hear citizen concerns first hand in his latest community policing initiative.

"We're taking York Regional Police on the road," Fantino told reporters Thursday. "We'll be listening to the issues and concerns from the very people that we are mandated to protect."

The 10 town hall forums are groundbreaking for a York Region police chief, signalling a new open approach to policing.

Fantino said he hopes to hear what York Region residents want from their police force, so it can become more proactive.

"We want to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime," he said.

But he also emphasized that fighting crime and creating a safe community is a two-way street.

The public and police have to work together or the community policing project won't work, he said.

"This is the new wave of how we



JULIAN FANTINO
Working together fighting crime and its causes

solve problems," Fantino said. "We want to be plugged right in. Hopefully this will appeal to the public to become involved."

At the forums, Fantino and other officers will highlight some of the department's new programs, such as the helicopter test project.

Some of those new initiatives include:

- The traffic enforcement strategy, which has seen charges rise by 44 per cent in a zero-tolerance program.

- The Community Response Unit, which is used to assist regular patrolling officers in areas such as crowd control.

- The street beat program, designed to stop street-level crime, such as drug trafficking.

"We're moving from a reactive organization to a proactive one," the chief said. "The culture of York Regional Police is changing dramatically."

Fantino said residents will also learn how they can become involved with groups such as Neighborhood Watch and VIGARS, a victims' assistance program.

The meetings will also include a question-and-answer session. That's when residents can voice crime concerns specific to their communities.

"There are a lot of persistent, nagging problems out there," Fantino said.

He pointed to petty crimes, such as vandalism and thefts from vehicles, that are "very bothersome to the community."

TOWN HALL MEETINGS ARE:

- ☐ Aurora, Sept. 22 at 7:30 p.m. at Devins Drive Public School.
- ☐ Newmarket, Sept. 30 at 8 p.m. at Dr. Denison high school, 135 Bristol Rd.
- ☐ East Gwillimbury, Oct. 13 at 7:30 p.m. at the Civic Centre, 19000 Leslie St.
- ☐ King Township, Oct. 14 at 7:30 p.m. at King City Secondary School.
- ☐ Whitchurch-Stouffville, Oct. 20 at 7:30 p.m. at Glad Park Public School.
- ☐ Georgina, Oct. 21 at 7:30 p.m. at the town hall in Keswick.
- ☐ Maple, Oct. 26 at 7:30 p.m. in the community centre at 10190 Keele St.
- ☐ Richmond Hill, Oct. 21 at 7:30 p.m. at the McConaghy Centre, 10100 Yonge St.
- ☐ Woodbridge, Nov. 24 at 7:30 p.m. in the community centre at 9201 Islington Ave.
- ☐ Markham, Nov. 25 at 7:30 p.m. in the Armadale Community Centre at 2401 Denison St.

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