

Police board to reconsider policy of simultaneous release of FOI requests

By JEFF LEE
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The Vancouver police board will review the department's policy of releasing information requested under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act simultaneously to both the requester and the public, after being told by FOI advocates it is not adhering to the spirit of the law.

On Wednesday Vincent Gogolek, the executive director of the B.C. Freedom of Information and Privacy Association, said the Vancouver police department remains the lone holdout on a questionable policy that many view as a deterrent to people asking for information under the act.

In May, provincial information and privacy commissioner Elizabeth Denham slammed BC Ferries' practice of posting FOI requests online before or as it releases a copy to the original requester. Last month,

Vancouver council unanimously adopted a policy of not engaging in such practices.

And on Tuesday the provincial government changed its policy to give requesters at least 72 hours with the documents before posting them online for others to see. But the police board has so far refused to accept the position of the provincial FOI commissioner or city council's motion.

Gogolek and journalist Stanley Tromp both appealed to the police board to instruct the department to halt the practice.

"This policy is designed to frustrate requesters who seek information that could embarrass the police, and its management. These requesters are often, but not always, members of the media," Gogolek said.

Police-board member Jason McLean, a member of its FOI committee, said he and others would review the request. He confirmed that the board has the power to

instruct the police department to obey the act.

Glenn Wong, another member of the board's FOI committee, suggested that the police department may have valid reasons for ignoring council's instructions, since it deals with confidential investigative matters.

But Tromp pointed out that other police and military organizations, including the RCMP and the Department of National Defence, do not engage in simultaneous release and, in fact, give requesters anywhere from a day to a month before posting synopses of requests online.

<http://www.vancouver.sun.com/news/Police+board+reconsider+policy+simultaneous+release+requests/5134357/story.html#ixzz1ShtjSyd3>

jefflee@vancouver.sun.com

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