

Schomberg residents want high-risk offender out

By Jake Courtepatte

Area residents came out in droves to Trisan Centre in Schomberg Sunday afternoon to discuss the community's controversial new member.

Most were looking for answers as to how to drive Keith Theodore Constantin, 35, out of town.

The high-risk offender was placed last week in a rural facility outside the town of Schomberg.

York Regional Police, the Ministry of Correctional Services, and King Township councillors fielded dozens of questions in an attempt to put to ease the minds of the around 300 residents that packed the hall.

"I don't want to be here, and you don't want to be here," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "But this is something that needs to be discussed openly as a community."

Constantin was released following a four-year jail term for sexual assault with a weapon, and an 18-month term for violating his curfew conditions. His rap sheet includes sexually assaulting a seven-year old boy, sexually assaulting a 45-year-old blind woman, robbing two variety stores with a starter pistol, and raping and beating a woman at knife point.

One resident commented that her children have suffered anxiety due to the situation, a statement that was met with clapping from around the room.

"It is not fair to the children of this community to have to worry about this," she declared. "People move to Schomberg because it is a safe, small community, a good place for their children to grow up in."

According to York Regional Police Detective Brian Arnold, the facility is "highly-secured" to keep Constantin contained.

"The house is alarmed," Arnold said. "He can't go out of the house, he can't even open a window without an alarm going off."

"We will be conducting ongoing visits to the premise, talking with the caseworkers, making sure they know they can be in touch with us at any time. If they have any concerns, or there's any changes in behavior, they know to contact us."

The government-funded facility will be monitored at all times by three caseworkers, though some residents expressed concerns that they will remain unarmed.

David Mitchell, regional director with the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services, said the staff are "very well-trained to handle the situation."

"Nobody wants anything to happen," he said. "This is what they specialize in, managing these offenders. They have protocols in place, somebody is within five to 10 feet of him at all times. There are no staff sleeping when he's sleeping, when he's sleeping the staff is awake. They will have him monitored 24/7. This isn't their first time."

There are currently 320 registered offenders living within York Region, the meeting was told.

Others were concerned that Constantin will not be fitted with an ankle bracelet.

"At the time, there are no provisions from the York Regional Police to put an ankle bracelet on him," Arnold commented. "That is something that may come up through probation and parole, if they deem it necessary, but at this point there is no chance he's even leaving the residence."

"Any exposure he would have to the community has to be approved through us and the probation office, prior to him actually leaving the residence. It would be a 24-hour notification to us and the probation office before he would even be allowed to go and we have to approve that in advance."

Exposure to the community, however, is unpreventable when Constantin's probation period ends in 2018, with one attendee yelling "garbage!" when this was announced to the room.

"If somebody is successful through their probation, that the courts have determined they have finished their sentence and there are no other issues, then that is not up to us," Arnold explained.

Many were left wondering why King Township was chosen? Since his release, Constantin has moved between group homes in Hamilton, Stoney Creek and now Schomberg.

"The entire council of King Township is here," Pellegrini addressed the crowd. "We will continue to engage with the community and work on this. We'll bring it up at council."

"We had no choice," he told the meeting. "We found out (last Wednesday), I was with the chief Thursday morning and asking 'how can this happen?' There's a community in uproar about this, what can we do??"

He told the attendees they can write to their MP and MPP on the matter, as it is beyond a municipal issue.

"As a community, we send in a lot of these, our voice is heard," he said. "I recommend strongly that you write your MPP and MP."