

Council agrees to public meeting following racially motivated conflicts at CDDHS

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As the Shelburne community continues to reel from escalating 'racially motivated' incidents at the local high school, a call for a public meeting discussing the matter has been raised by members of the community.

During their meeting on Monday (June 27), Shelburne Town Council received a delegation from resident Gary Whitworth requesting a meeting between council, parents, teachers, principals, school board trustees, and the Dufferin OPP liaison to address the incidents.

'When there are children that fear for their lives and have nightmares about being shot and killed, and yes that's what they are afraid of, we as adults are at fault,' said Whitworth. 'Children do not see skin color it is adults who teach children that there is a difference. Words can be harmful.'

Mayor Wade Mills affirmed council's support and willingness to take part in a public meeting at Centre Dufferin District High School (CDDHS), but also noted the need to have representatives from both the high school and the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) present for there to be any impact.

'We cannot be the only player at the table and one of the most significant players at the table must be the schools and school board,' said Mills. 'Quick frankly, if we cannot have them at the table then I don't think we can have a constructive conversation about this incident.'

At a council meeting earlier this month, Dufferin OPP Insp. Terry Ward informed council of two incidents at the local high school that had been deemed 'racially motivated'. At the time, Ward told council there was little the police service could do without there being a call to service.

A notice released by Centre Dufferin shortly after the initial incident confirmed that the fights at the high school were precipitated by the use of anti-black language and anti-black slurs.

Tension came to a boil, when information of a 'potential general threat' and indication it would be carried out on the final day of instruction (June 17) resulted students being moved to virtual learning. An investigation by police and the school did not substantiate any potential threat.

The incident is being managed internally by Centre Dufferin and the UGDSB.

Shelburne's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee issued a statement during Monday's council meeting in response to the incident at the high school and growing tension within the community.

In the statement the DEI Committee said they were troubled by the incident and reject all forms of racism and discrimination. They also noted that all the details have yet to be released and that they want to be respectful to all parties involved as well as to the ongoing investigation.

'It is important that our schools remain safe, welcoming and inclusive for all of our students and staff,' wrote the DEI Committee. 'While significant progress has been made to strengthen our schools and community, we recognize that more work needs to be done.'

The committee added they support an open and transparent investigation followed by meaningful work and recommend implementing a process to work with the school, school board, students, families, and community partners to find solutions to issues raised.

A date for a potential public meeting has not yet been determined.