



THE DISTRICT OF THUNDER BAY  
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION BOARD

# Keeping Our Community Housing Safe: Special Constables Pilot

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## POSITION PAPER

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**Rural Ontario Municipal Association (ROMA) Conference**

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Prepared for:

Hon. Michael S. Kerzner, Solicitor General of Ontario

# Brief

The District of Thunder Bay Social Services Administration Board (TBDSSAB) requests that the Solicitor General of Ontario accepts our proposal for funding a two-year pilot project to address the safety of the residents living in Community Housing. This funding would assist with the creation of a team of Special Constables from the Thunder Bay Police Services (TBPS) that would service TBDSSAB direct owned housing and help provide safe and secure neighbourhoods for residents and our community.

## Summary

In recent years, the tenant demographic served by TBDSSAB has changed significantly. Previously, tenant demography constituted primarily of low-income families and seniors. Recently, due to the high incidence of homelessness and a desire to house individuals, the resident mix of TBDSSAB's direct-owned housing units include individuals experiencing high risk behaviours, those who may be extremely vulnerable and some residents who are not capable of independent living. Given TBDSSAB's responsibility of delivering community housing under the Housing Services Act, we cannot deny applications from these vulnerable individuals. In addition to this change in applicants, the District of Thunder Bay has experienced a dramatic increase in crime. Often, there is an intersection between the perpetrators of criminal acts and tenants, which has resulted in an increase in deviant behavior around our directly owned properties. The combination of these issues has put pressure on TBDSSAB's ability to maintain a safe and secure environment for its tenants and staff who help manage the properties.

# Background

As part of its mandate as a housing service manager, TBDSSAB operates properties throughout the district, with majority located within the City of Thunder Bay. In the past, the majority of the tenant demographic residing in TBDSSAB's properties constituted low-income families and seniors. However, in recent years, the tenant demographic has widened to include individuals living with mental health and/or addiction issues and people who are incapable of living independently. These demographic changes have resulted in criminal elements taking advantage of some of the vulnerable population living in these properties. Two news articles – published 10 years apart – attest to the increase in criminal activities and the effect on its residents<sup>1</sup>.

According to Stats Canada's 2021 Population Census, the District of Thunder Bay is home to a population of 146,862<sup>2</sup>. In March 2025, Fraser Institute released a report titled 'Comparing Recent Crime Trends in Canada and the United States'<sup>3</sup>. In the report, the author compared violent crime rates per capita in census metropolitan areas (CMAs) from 2019-2022. In his assessment, the author found that the City of Thunder Bay has the highest 'violent crime rate' in Ontario (at 546 per 100,000) and second in Canada<sup>4</sup>, as shown in the image below. It is worth noting, in the context of this paper, that many research studies have shown the correlation between the perpetrators of criminal activities and vulnerable population(s).

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<sup>1</sup> In a 2023 CBC news article, a TBDSSAB tenant – who has lived in the property for four year – said “she no longer brings her grandchildren to visit because she feels it's so unsafe” ([Thunder Bay Housing residents living in fear | CBC News](#)). Another article, published in 2023, also highlighted continued tenancy concerns ([How drug trafficking and shootings in Thunder Bay's social housing impact people living there | CBC News](#)).

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, 2021 Census of Population.

<sup>3</sup> This report used comparisons of compatible/comparable categories of different offences across Canada and the US. In its assessment, the author shows comparisons between 'Violent crime rates' and also 'Property Crime Rates'.

<sup>4</sup> The report shows that “for violent crimes, Winnipeg ranks first at 675 violent crimes per 100,000, followed by Thunder Bay, at 546 per 100,000” (Di Matteo 2025). Obtained from Fraser Institute, 'Comparing Recent Crime Trends in Canada and the United States'. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/ranking-crime-in-canada-and-the-united-states>.”

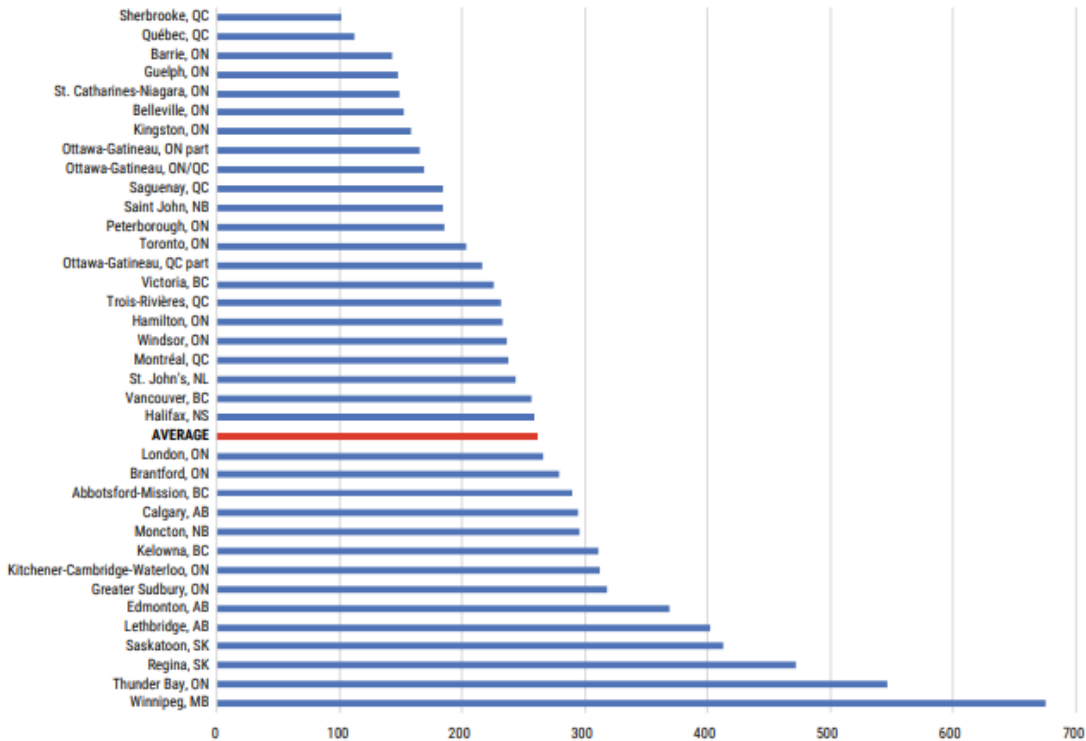


Figure 1 - Select Canadian CMAAs, Maximum Violent Crime Rate per 1000,000, 2019-2022 (Di Matteo:2025)

Based on the Auditor General of Ontario’s classification of groups considered as part of the vulnerable population, we consider that a significant contingent of TBDSSAB’s tenants – i.e. experiencing mental health and/or addiction issues – fall under this grouping. As a result of the intersection mentioned in the previous paragraph, tenants have voiced concerns about not feeling safe in their homes and neighborhood. News articles are replete with stories from TBDSSAB tenants who are “scared to leave their homes...” with concerns about “drug trafficking taking place in the building, with non-residents regularly on the premises”<sup>5</sup>.

To address these concerns, TBDSSAB approached the security issue using a multi-pronged approach. TBDSSAB has invested heavily in video surveillance equipment, engaged in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) improvements<sup>6</sup>, contracted extensive third-party security services and engaged on regular and ongoing tenant education. This also included leveraging our relationship with the Thunder Bay Police Service (TBPS). In 2017, there was an information

<sup>5</sup> CBC News (2025). “Mclvor Court residents hold rally over safety concerns”. Extracted from [Mclvor Court residents hold rally over safety concerns | CBC News](#).

<sup>6</sup> The premise of CPTED is that “the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the incidence and fear of crime, and an improvement in life” (CPTED Canada.com)

sharing agreement signed between both parties to provide the TBPS access to TBDSSAB's surveillance recordings. In addition, the partnership also bore collaboration on joint efforts between TBDSSAB staff and the Community Oriented Response and Engagement unit (CORE) of TBPS in 2021. One of the joint responsibilities of the CORE unit is to do home visits mitigating illegal actions<sup>7</sup> taking place within TBDSSAB direct-owned housing. Since its inception till date, there have been 681 joint visits.

Another approach TBDSSAB took was performing a security audit on all directly owned buildings. The outcome of the audit was a report of the findings and recommendations. Among the findings was the impact of perception and how the public hold misconceptions about community housing. And when left unchecked, it exacerbates unfounded beliefs about the population who reside in these properties. Some recommendations include the use of mobile security patrols to discourage and prevent deviant behaviors from occurring.

While the operationalization of the CORE unit has yielded positive outcomes, criminal activities around our properties are still ongoing (news coverage of recent incidents shown in [Appendix A](#) below). Further, TBPS has indicated an inability to fully address the needs at TBDSSAB properties due to a shortage of policing personnel. As such, a collaboration between TBDSSAB and TBPS concluded that creating a team of Special Constables assigned to patrolling our properties and enforcing bylaws and Acts would help address the issue.

The proposed model, similar to the program in Toronto<sup>8</sup>, involves creating a team of Special Constables that consists of one supervisor and four TBPS officers. Given the comprehensive training they have undergone as Peace Officers, this team will be equipped with the appropriate skillsets to address concerns related to substance use and addiction. As such, we believe that the presence of Special Constables around the properties would help mitigate security-related incidents, discourage deviant behaviours from occurring and in turn, allow tenants to feel safe and possibly address the public's misconceptions of community housing. This would also have the added

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<sup>7</sup> These illegal actions include reducing home takeovers and to support at risk-tenants.

<sup>8</sup> Toronto Community Housing collaborated with the Police Service to create the 'Community Safety Unit' of Special Constables. These Constables have the authority to enforce various laws in the City of Toronto if the offence is connected to a Toronto Community Housing or vehicle.

benefit of reduced police calls to TBDSSAB properties, resulting in more time for officers to address other activities throughout the city.

Operationalizing a team of Special Constables would require an operational investment of \$500,000 per year. This proposed cost would enable a consistent presence of the team around our properties. Following the two-year pilot, an assessment on the success and lessons learned would help inform its continuity.

Therefore, TBDSSAB requests that the Solicitor General of Ontario provides funding of \$1,000,000 over 2 years to enable TBDSSAB to work with the Thunder Bay Police Service on a two-year pilot that would involve a team of Special Constables, which would allow us to meet our mandate of providing a safe and secure environment for our tenants.

# Appendix A

## 1. CBC News (2023) Article

Thunder Bay

### **How drug trafficking and shootings in Thunder Bay's social housing impact people living there**

Recent shooting at Spence Court has put social housing safety in the spotlight



[Sarah Law](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jun 01, 2023 5:00 AM EDT | Last Updated: June 1, 2023

Image one - Obtained from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/thunderbay-safety-shootings-socialhousing-1.6860822>.

## 2. CBC News (Jan. 2025) article

Thunder Bay

### **Homicide at social housing building in Thunder Bay, Ont., sparks calls for more security measures**

Death at McIvor Court remains under investigation with no arrests made, police say



[Sarah Law](#) · CBC News · Posted: Jan 29, 2025 4:00 AM EST | Last Updated: January 29

Image two - Obtained from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/thunder-bay-social-housing-safety-concerns-1.7443946>

3. TBNewswatch (Jan 2025) article

HOME > LOCAL NEWS

## 'Terrified': McIvor Court residents react to homicide

Police still holding the scene Thursday afternoon as investigation continues



Matt Prokopchuk  
Jan 16, 2025 5:15 PM



1 / 3 Thunder Bay police officers hold the scene of a homicide on January 16 2025. | Matt Prokopchuk

Image three - Obtained from <https://www.tbnewswatch.com/local-news/terrified-mcivor-court-residents-react-to-homicide-10088244>

4. CBC News (Feb. 2025) article

Thunder Bay

## McIvor Court residents hold rally over safety concerns

Building was the scene of a homicide this year; residents say drug trafficking, other issues persist

CBC News · Posted: Feb 14, 2025 4:26 PM EST | Last Updated: February 14

Image four - <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/mcivor-court-rally-1.7459791>