

**Subject Matter**

Shifting to Battenburg Markings for Ottawa Police Service vehicles.

**Person(s) who will be appearing before the Board**

Kevin O'Donnell

To: Ottawa Police Services Board Chair, via the Executive Director

Subject to the Police Services Board Procedure By-law, I request that the Chair place an item on the next meeting's agenda to address how the Ottawa Police paint their vehicles.

In recent years a trend has emerged in Canada wherein police services are presenting a more intimidating, menacing face to the public, by way of how the services are choosing to paint vehicles. The trend is towards darker tones and less visible markings.

What public policy goal does that choice achieve? It certainly is not to make it easier for the public to see police officers.

As such, I recommend the Board provide direction to the Ottawa Police Service to end this practice, immediately, and begin the process of repainting vehicles in with Battenburg Markings, as explored in Appendix A.

Additionally, I recommend the Board direct the Ottawa Police Service to explain its current policy on vehicle markings, and justify why it has not already - under its own initiative - moved to a more visible, less intimidating style of markings.

I look forward to the Chair accepting this item for consideration by the Board at an upcoming meeting, and participating in that meeting as per the existing Rules of Procedure.

Best Regards,  
Kevin O'Donnell  
City of Ottawa resident.

# Appendix A: Why did Canadian police cars become so menacing?

<https://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/10/20/opinion/why-did-canadian-police-cars-become-so-menacing>



When did our community policing culture shift from one of assistance to perceived intimidation, and where did our honoured, approachable peace officers go?

Are we following the footsteps of US police forces, which are armed with riot gear, armoured vehicles and other military-grade equipment?

Having built my life as a design professional in the field of visual culture over the past 20 years, I have to ask what purpose is served by the recent shift in police vehicle design in cities across Canada.

Toronto police cruisers are getting a drastic make-over, from white with bright red and blue decals, to stealth-like dark grey colours with equally somber decals that blend into the paint. Calgary recently switched its police vehicles to what's been called "aggressive" and "paramilitary" black and white.



And Vancouver unveiled black, stealth-like vehicles back in 2013.



Left: old Vancouver police car. Right: New Vancouver police cruiser.

Did the design briefs state and call for oppressive, aggressive, intimidating and combative traits?

That's what these designs convey.

### **Design forms our visual culture and creates reality**

We need to be more mindful and aware. Design forms our visual culture, which forms perception and ultimately creates our reality.

There's a real connection between the use of colours and perceptions. For instance, grey is the colour of detachment, indecision and compromise. The closer grey fades to black, the more dramatic and mysterious it becomes.

Many countries in Europe, as well as Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong, have used bright, colourful [Battenburg Markings](#) for decades to gain visibility.



The purpose of this universal language of assistance is to:

- Enhance officer and public safety by reducing the likelihood of road accidents
- Be recognizable as a police vehicle up to a distance of 1,600 ft. in normal daylight
- Assist in high visibility policing to reassure the public and enhance potential deterrent benefits.

Fortunately, the RCMP, internationally known for its scarlet red uniforms, has maintained vivid colour schemes. It suggests RCMP officers are not lurking in the shadows waiting to get you. They're out in the open, there to help.

So where's this antagonistic 'design of darkness' coming from? Is it a reflection of our police forces' internal psychology and culture?

It shouldn't be. Not even close.

Canada is among the most peaceful nations in the world, welcoming and celebrating diverse nationalities and cultures. That's not just a stereotype of politeness, apologetic kindness and quick smiles, it's a fact.

Using 23 indicators to gauge ongoing domestic and international conflict, societal safety, security and militarization, the United Nations' Global Peace Index ranks Canada 4th behind Iceland, Denmark and New Zealand.

That's something to be proud of. And our police culture — how officers show up — needs to reflect who we are as a nation.

### **Police should be community leaders, not prison guards**

We need officers to be community leaders, not prison guards. Police can be a beacon of light and enhance the quality of life for everyone in our communities. They're integral to our safety, security and well-being.

We need officers on the street engaging community, visiting schools, chatting with students and handing out swag, not scaring the crap out of law-abiding citizens.

There might be a few bad apples we see in the media, but police officers are courageous, responsible individuals with empathy and compassion. They demonstrate integrity and respectful engagement and collaboration with citizens.

I recently had the pleasure of listening to BC RCMP's Lower Mainland District Commander Bill Fordy speak at a CreativeMornings event, where innovators explore and share ideas. He said he became a police officer "to help people." He spoke a lot about being trustworthy, transparent, visible and engaging the community.

Those are powerful values, and they reflect who we are as a nation. So instead of being led down the dark and dismal military path, let's consciously demonstrate and illuminate our radiant values to the world.

Although it's 'not Canadian' to praise ourselves, it's important to recognize our successes, and periodically pat ourselves on the back.

### **Policing design should cultivate a safe and inclusive identity**

We need to open up public discussions to stop this fear-mongering trend.

Design communities need to provide insight, input and guidance to establish the right meanings and messages. It's critical on so many levels, from how it impacts our children's views and behaviours to the type of recruits the police force attracts.

Others will look to us and follow.

Case in point: Los Angeles Police Department recruits are being taught "Canadian values and ideas" during their six-month courses. Yes, we're teaching our friends to the South critical thinking and concepts like community values.

So let's be true to ourselves and our values, and have our peace officers connect, collaborate and lead our communities with the right image and visual messages. Let's cultivate, nurture and shape friendly, vibrant and inclusive communities where we can all be safe, healthy and happy. It's a true reflection of who we are.

It's the Canadian way.

*Johnathon Vaughn Strebly is Ethics chair and President, Graphic Designers of Canada (GDC)*