

Community activists, clergy, police gather for discussion on decision

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Several community activists and clergy said during two community meetings Tuesday that they are hopeful protests will remain peaceful in the wake of a grand jury's decision not to indict two police officers involved in the fatal shooting of Tamir Rice.

One of the meetings had been scheduled for weeks, but it took on a new purpose after Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Timothy J. McGinty announced Monday that a grand jury elected not to charge officers Timothy Loehmann and Frank Garmback in the 12-year-old boy's death.

The decision resulted in several dozen demonstrators marching through the streets to protest the decision.

Officers from the Cleveland Division of Police, members of the Cleveland Peacemakers Alliance

and clergy participated in a previously scheduled community meeting at 10 a.m. at the Cleveland Public Library branch on West 140th Street at Puritas Avenue. The majority of the group then participated in another brief meeting, scheduled Monday following the grand jury decision, at 11 a.m. at Cudell Recreation Center.

Eight people, including three police officers, attended the meeting at the library. Six of them then joined four newcomers for the meeting at the recreation center.

Those in attendance said they were pleased Monday's demonstrations remained peaceful. But they were concerned the demonstrations might turn violent in the future.

Thirty demonstrators marched Monday from the recreation center to the First District police headquarters on West 130th Street at West Avenue. Officers blocked traffic along the route to allow demonstrators to pass.

"I don't know if it's directed at the prosecutor, or the police, or the system as a whole, but you can feel the tension," said Angel Arroyo, a member of the Cleveland Peacemakers Alliance.

The Cleveland Division of Police is prepared for any future protests and plans to allow demonstrators to march peacefully. Officers will step in if the protests turn violence or if demonstrators begin to damage property, 1st District Commander Thomas McCartney said during the meetings.

Several in attendance discussed other issues related to the shooting, including whether manufacturers should be prohibited from selling realistic pellet guns. They also expressed a desire to strengthen the relationships between police officers and the communities they serve.

"I was sad yesterday," said Salina Smith, a member of the Cleveland Peacemakers Alliance. "But there are so many aspects to this."