

A Service Worth Keeping

The Temiskaming Shores Police Service has provided local, municipal policing to New Liskeard since 1963. With dedicated 24 hour a day coverage, the police respond promptly to calls for assistance, are highly successful in solving cases and maintain an active and visible presence in community neighbourhoods. They also effectively enforce local by-laws in New Liskeard.

Officers are approachable, and have made Temiskaming Shores the place where they want to live, work, raise their families and participate as active members of the community.

The Temiskaming Shores Police Service Dispatch Centre allows residents, visitors and travellers to speak with local personnel 24 hours a day. In a crisis every second counts. There is no substitute for local dispatch when you are reporting an emergency or trying to describe an urgent or potentially life-threatening situation.

In fact, the municipal police Dispatch Centre not only provides local service for the Temiskaming Shores Police, but city-wide and area fire dispatch, city-wide public works (after-hours) dispatch and Enhanced 911 for South Temiskaming.

The Temiskaming Shores Police Service has a complement of 9 officers and the chief, and the Dispatch Centre has 5 full-time and 2 part-time staff, who also serve as special constables. Administrative support is provided to the Service by 1 full-time and 1 part-time staff.

As a municipal police service, the Temiskaming Shores Police Service is accountable to and takes direction from the local police services board, through the Chief of Police. A majority of board members are appointed directly by City Council, ensuring local community policing remains a priority.

Like all municipal police services in Ontario, the Temiskaming Shores Police has signed agreements in place with the OPP to provide specialized services, on an as needed basis, with the province paying for associated costs. This practice has been in place for many years.

While New Liskeard ratepayers have been responsible for the cost of the Temiskaming Shores Police Service, the entire area has benefited from the enhanced level of service and dispatch centre.

As a municipal and district service centre, every workday 2,500 people come to New Liskeard from surrounding communities for school, shopping, work, medical care and recreational activities, making it the busiest centre in Timiskaming. Annual district events like the Fall Fair, Summerfest, Bikers Reunion, Snowfest, and hockey tournaments draw additional crowds to downtown, benefiting the local economy, but requiring community police resources.

This influx of people creates additional needs for policing beyond the 2,240 New Liskeard households. The enhanced level of service and community visibility provided by the Temiskaming Shores Police ensures that residents, businesses and visitors remain safe.

With the OPP contract proposal, community residents and visitors would no longer have access to local, in person dispatch service. Nor would there be a downtown police station, unless Council paid to establish, equip and maintain a part-time community storefront, in addition to the proposed basic contract cost.

Amalgamation was intended to allow the new municipality to work together on common goals, and pool administration and public works resources. It was never promoted as a way to eliminate the distinctive qualities of the three founding communities, or to disenfranchise an entire community from maintaining a local service for which they pay and enjoy responsive service.

The hybrid policing model in Temiskaming Shores, with municipal police in New Liskeard and OPP in Dymond and Haileybury continues to serve the municipality well. Temiskaming Shores is not alone in adopting and maintaining this model after amalgamation. The hybrid model is being used successfully in several other communities across the province, including:

- Timmins (Timmins Police in the city and OPP in South Porcupine and area)
- Kawartha Lakes (Kawartha Lakes Police in Lindsay and OPP in rest of county)
- Kenora (Kenora Police in town and OPP in Keewatin and Jaffray Melick)
- Peel Region (Peel Police in Mississauga and Brampton and OPP in Caledon)

The Temiskaming Shores Police Service and Dispatch Centre continues to provide a vital role in the community. New Liskeard ratepayers continue to be very satisfied with the enhanced level of service provided, and have not agreed to either disbandment or a reduction in service. The provincial government is finally providing an annual subsidy to offset New Liskeard policing costs, and the proposed disbandment of the Temiskaming Shores Police will result in increased costs to local ratepayers and a reduced level of service in New Liskeard.

All of this should lead Council to revisit and reverse its unnecessary push for disbandment and focus on more pressing matters. The Temiskaming Shores Police is a service worth keeping! It's not too late for Council to do the right thing.

However, since Council seems intent on pursuing disbandment, it should respect local ratepayers by suspending its artificial deadline for an OPP contract, gather all the facts and costs associated with disbandment, and submit them to New Liskeard ratepayers in a municipal referendum in November's election.

(This column first appeared in a community newspaper April 26, 2006)

For more information, or to get involved, please visit www.kops.ca