

Council Stalls; Misses Deadline for Referendum

Despite repeated requests from local residents and KOPS for a referendum on the future of New Liskeard policing during November's municipal election, Temiskaming Shores Council has allowed the deadline to pass without taking action.

When the topic was discussed at the May 8, 2006, Council meeting, city staff advised that the legislated deadline to submit proposed referendum questions to the provincial government had passed. As a result, local residents and ratepayers will be denied a vote on Council's misguided decision to disband the Temiskaming Shores Police Service and Dispatch Centre.

People expect their elected representatives to say what they will do, and then do what they say. This is especially true at the local level. Councillors should honour their word and actively consult with residents about decisions that affect them.

First, local residents were told the amalgamation discussions included a commitment to locate the city hall in Haileybury, phase in residential tax increases in Dymond and maintain municipal policing in New Liskeard. Only the city hall and Dymond tax promises have been kept, while Council actively seeks to eliminate local municipal policing in New Liskeard.

Second, local residents were asked to support candidates for Council during the last municipal election, based on their platforms. None of the current councillors said they would seek disbandment of the Temiskaming Shores Police Service if elected.

Third, these same men have voted to disband the Temiskaming Shores Police Service without obtaining all the facts and costs, without consulting with residents and ratepayers, and without obtaining a public consensus to proceed with their plan.

Now, after months of asking Council to suspend disbandment and allow a full and transparent public debate and vote, local residents are told it is too late to set up a referendum for November's election.

Whether Council deliberately let the referendum deadline pass, or whether they simply dragged their feet in determining the publicly available legislated timelines involved is unknown. What is known is that Council has had no hesitation in dispensing with public notice, calling snap votes, and denying the public any advance or meaningful say in decisions relating to disbandment.

The public has not been well served by Council's rush to disband the Temiskaming Shores Police Service and Dispatch Centre, which will result in a reduction in level of service, lost jobs and increased costs.

Without a referendum, Councillors Danny Whalen and Brian Hughes have ensured that their unbalanced and mean-spirited drive to disband the Temiskaming Shores Police will be front and centre in November's municipal election. If Temiskaming Shores residents cannot have a referendum on policing this fall, they will at least have a referendum on whether councillors have kept their promises, consulted with the public and helped to build a stronger community.

(This column first appeared in a community newspaper May 17, 2006)

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