

## **Disbandment Will Mean Loss of Local Dispatch**

If Temiskaming Shores Council succeeds in disbanding the municipal police, residents of Temiskaming Shores and the surrounding area will lose their local dispatch service.

The Temiskaming Shores Police Service Dispatch Centre provides 24/7 service to residents across the city and 13 area municipalities in South Temiskaming.

Staffed by 5 full-time and 2 part-time dispatchers, who also serve as special constables, the Dispatch Centre provides area-wide Enhanced 911 dispatch, city-wide and area fire dispatch, city-wide public works dispatch and Temiskaming Shores Police dispatch. The Dispatch Centre also provides after hours telephone answering and alarm monitoring services for a number of agencies and private citizens, which generates revenue for the municipality.

City staff have advised Council that the cost of replacing the police service Dispatch Centre with a new municipal stand alone dispatch service for fire, 911 and public works will cost the same as the current service (approximately \$300,000 per year). New Liskeard police calls would no longer be answered by local dispatchers; instead they would go to the OPP call centre in North Bay.

Since the dispatch centre is part of the Temiskaming Shores Police Service, the cost of operation is now partially subsidized through an annual policing grant by the provincial government. If the Temiskaming Shores Police Service is disbanded and the city sets up a new dispatch service, it would not be considered a policing cost and would no longer qualify for the operating subsidy. The result would be increased dispatch costs for Enhanced 911, fire and public works, and New Liskeard police calls would have to go to North Bay.

Intent on disbanding the Temiskaming Shores Police Service contrary to the wishes of New Liskeard ratepayers who pay for the service, Councillor Danny Whalen is proposing an even more distasteful dispatch alternative that will affect all city and South Temiskaming residents. Councillor Whalen thinks that the Dispatch Centre should also be disbanded, local jobs terminated, and a private, out-of-district company be hired to answer emergency calls from Temiskaming Shores and area.

Since city staff have reported that no existing businesses in Timiskaming District can provide 24/7 dispatch service for Enhanced 911, fire and public works, Councillor Whalen's strategy means sending local tax dollars out of the area for dispatch service.

Do you want to put a life or death dispatch call in the hands of an out-of-district business unfamiliar with the area? Do you think Temiskaming Shores can afford to lose any more jobs?

Area residents appreciate and expect local dispatch when making emergency calls. The current Dispatch Centre is local, dedicated and more responsive than what would be received from outside agencies.

Since the difference in price between the OPP policing quote and the Temiskaming Shores Police Service is essentially the cost of operating the local dispatch service, switching to OPP would not provide any real cost savings to Temiskaming Shores taxpayers.

If Council closes down the Dispatch Centre and contracts with an out-of-district dispatch call centre, it may save money, but it won't be because of disbanding the Temiskaming Shores Police. In fact, the cost of policing New Liskeard will go up, with a reduced level of service, and the loss of the direct oversight the local police services board has with a municipal police service.

No, if Council closes down the Dispatch Centre to save money, it will only be done by laying off local dispatchers - cutting local jobs - and sending ratepayer tax dollars to an out-of-district agency or business.

The Dispatch Centre staff will not be given job offers with the OPP since their dispatching is done out of North Bay.

There is no substitute for dedicated local policing and dispatch. It's time Council deferred to local ratepayers, stopped disbandment and got to work encouraging economic development and job creation to keep existing families in the city, providing opportunities for young people to return, and enhancing local infrastructure and services.

*(This column first appeared in a community newspaper May 3, 2006)*

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