

Something to Think About

At the April 27, 2006, Temiskaming Shores Council budget meeting, a recommendation was adopted to implement a blended assessment rate for city policing costs. This follows last year's move to blend city-wide water and sewer rates.

While residents may have different views on this development, it does not change the fundamental issues surrounding opposition to the disbandment of the Temiskaming Shores Police Service.

From the beginning of Councillor Whalen's push to replace the Temiskaming Shores Police Service and Dispatch Centre with an OPP policing contract and an out-of-district dispatch service for fire and public works, New Liskeard residents and ratepayers have pointed to the amalgamation agreement.

As it was generally understood, the leaders of the former three municipalities had agreed to locate the city hall in Haileybury, maintain municipal policing in New Liskeard and phase in any residential tax increases in Dymond.

Recently, those involved in the amalgamation discussions have stated that the arrangements were a personal agreement or commitment at the time in order to move amalgamation forward. They have emphasized that the agreement was never legally binding on either the transition board or the subsequent Council.

No one disputes that a Council cannot legally bind their successors. However, like Haileybury residents who were rightfully concerned when Council initially wavered on giving them the city hall, New Liskeard residents feel the agreement is morally binding for two reasons.

First, New Liskeard residents based their support of amalgamation on the understanding that the terms of the agreement – particularly maintaining municipal policing in New Liskeard – would be honoured by the new council.

Second, local residents based their support for candidates in the 2003 municipal election on their stated position on a variety of issues, including policing. Not one of the current councillors publicly said they would seek disbandment of the Temiskaming Shores Police Service during the 2004-2006 term.

When Council decided it wanted to pursue disbandment, contrary to both the agreement and their individual election platforms, they should have advised the community and initiated a full and fair public consultation with affected residents.

New Liskeard is a service centre for the entire municipality. There are at least 2,500 people coming into New Liskeard every workday from across South Temiskaming for jobs, school and other activities, making it the busiest centre in the district. All

Temiskaming Shores residents benefit from the police service while in town for work, errands or recreation and the dispatch centre serves the entire city.

Temiskaming Shores is not alone in using both municipal policing and OPP service in the same community. The following municipalities have hybrid policing with municipal service and OPP: Timmins, Kenora, Kawartha Lakes (Lindsay), Region of Peel, Sudbury, North Huron, Smith-Ennismore-Lakefield and Port Hope.

The hybrid model works in these municipalities and it works in Temiskaming Shores. Both police services have served the area well for the past 43 years and there is no reason to arbitrarily change the current model.

Council can be commended for examining all city costs during the budget process. However, with respect to basic services like policing, value for money is as important as the bottom line. Council has failed to seek, measure or place a value on the level of service provided by the Temiskaming Shores Police Service and Dispatch Centre.

But by not obtaining all the facts and costs and conducting a full public debate on policing options, Council has neglected the essential question of level of service and which police service is best positioned to provide it.

Amalgamation was supposed to draw the community closer, but Council's unfair and unbalanced push for disbandment of the Temiskaming Shores Police threatens to leave longstanding distrust and strife between residents of New Liskeard and Haileybury. This is both unnecessary and preventable.

The status quo for policing works. It was a promise made and communicated to area residents at amalgamation and the last election. Council should honour those promises and suspend disbandment now.

(This column first appeared in a community newspaper May 10, 2006)

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