

## **What Are You Paying For?**

City Council continues to push for disbandment of the Temiskaming Shores Police Service and Dispatch Centre, despite the opposition of affected residents and business owners.

There is widespread public support and satisfaction with the service provided by the Temiskaming Shores Police, so why is Council intent on pushing through a switch from a locally accountable municipal force to OPP service?

Councillor Whalen and Councillor Hughes claim an OPP contract will cost less than maintaining a municipal service. Cost is one factor to consider, along with local control and priority setting that only comes with municipal policing, and of course the wishes of affected ratepayers. However, the fact is Council has not demonstrated that OPP service will cost less than the current Temiskaming Shores Police Service. Instead, careful analysis points to increased costs with the OPP.

Council has failed to obtain adequate information for a fair and thorough costing and comparison of police services.

When Council requested an OPP quote for policing New Liskeard, it did not specify the level of service expected. At the very least, Council should have requested a price based on the current service levels provided by the Temiskaming Shores Police.

Instead, Council asked for an OPP price referring only to “historic records of the former Town of New Liskeard”. As a result, Council received a price for a reduced level of service based on crime statistics. When you consider that the current level of service provided by the Temiskaming Shores Police focuses on enhanced downtown and community visibility to make residents and business owners feel safe and deter crime, it appears that Council is comparing apples and oranges.

When most people buy a new computer or car, they not only ask how much does it cost, but what does it come with? We have all seen the price of such items rise considerably after finding out the basic price did not include the features we needed.

The same principle is valid for the policing debate. No one questions the professionalism of the OPP – they are the finest provincial force in North America – but there cannot be a fair comparison of costs for municipal policing without comparing level of service. Councillor Whalen was quoted by the media as saying the OPP does not give costings that provide for direct cost comparisons with other police services. That would make most people ask more questions and slow down, rather than making a rush decision to finalise the deal.

Is Council really concerned about saving money?

- Council did not request a Temiskaming Shores Police costing for New Liskeard to match the reduced service level proposed by the OPP

- Council did not request a city-wide Temiskaming Shores Police costing to get a sense of the cost to provide local municipal service to the entire community, which would provide enhanced service to Dymond and Haileybury and share the fixed cost of dispatch and administration
- Council has not done a thorough study of the many Ontario communities that disbanded their municipal police in the past ten years in favour of OPP service only to find the costs significantly rise after the first and subsequent contracts
- City staff have advised council that disbanding the Temiskaming Shores Police Service could easily reach \$1.1 million in staff severance – wouldn't it make more sense to spend only a portion of that amount to upgrade the current police station and maintain the current service instead?

The OPP costing does not include the overtime, by-law enforcement, city-wide and area fire dispatch and Enhanced 911 or after hours public works dispatch that is all currently provided by the Temiskaming Shores Police Service Dispatch Centre.

Dispatch and overtime costs will continue. By not adding them to the OPP contract price up front, it does not mean the City will no longer have to pay for them. The City will get overtime bills from the OPP, New Liskeard residents will have to call North Bay for police help, and the City will need to set up a new dispatch centre for fire and public works – or contract with a private out-of-district service.

As far as maintaining a visible, community policing presence in New Liskeard, the OPP has suggested the City consider obtaining a storefront office for the OPP to use when downtown. The City would be responsible for the substantial cost to establish, equip and maintain this new part-time OPP storefront. With the Temiskaming Shores Police, New Liskeard already has a full-time downtown headquarters, with live in-person 24/7 service.

The public has not been well served by Council's attempt to compare costs for policing New Liskeard without including the level of service affected ratepayers want and expect.

Councillor Whalen and Councillor Hughes have created a false crisis about policing costs. Instead of encouraging Council to gather all the facts and allowing the affected ratepayers to review and decide the future of policing, they have created a false sense of urgency to rush through disbandment before the next election.

Council should not proceed with a controversial decision on policing without public consultation and consensus. If they really believe disbandment will benefit New Liskeard ratepayers they should suspend their artificial deadline, gather all the facts and costs, and submit them to New Liskeard ratepayers in a municipal referendum during November's Council election.

*(This column first appeared in a community newspaper April 19, 2006)*

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