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What does it cost Hastings Highlands to sell lakeshore land?

To the Editor,

The surprise ending at last Wednesday's council meeting in Hastings Highlands left a packed gallery of ratepayers speechless. At the previous meeting Councillor Alex Walder made a motion to raise the sale price of lakeshore road allowances to abutting landowners ? which passed in a recorded vote four-three, with Councillor Nancy Matheson, Deputy Mayor Gregg Roberts, and Councillor Tracy Hagar voting nay, and Mayor Vivian Bloom voting yes to break the tie. The new cost raised the current price three-fold for the remaining ratepayers, estimated about 80 per cent who may need to purchase their abutting lakeshore land.

Near the end of the meeting Matheson suggested to cover our costs that perhaps we should proceed to revisit a discussion of the sale of the allowances.

The audience was left to speculate, perhaps the township costs in these land sales warranted the price hike, while giving council the option of adjusting the sale price to cover the township costs in future lakeshore sales.

In question period, for clarification the question was asked, ?What are the township costs? in a lakeshore sale? To ratepayers' surprise, the response was dead silence. None, neither the mayor nor any councillor or staff could identify any actual cost to the township.

Council members already know (or should know) that all normal costs of sale in the transaction of lakeshore land, namely all survey and legal costs, are borne by the abutting landowner/ratepayer. If there are no ?identifiable? costs to the township. Does this now make the Matheson motion null and void?

Hastings Highlands has the most lakes in the county. A majority of ratepayers in Hastings Highlands own waterfront property. The assessed value by MPAC on ?waterfront residential? (WR) land is substantially higher than comparable property values in the ?residential? class.

However, in the WR class the lakeshore owned by Hastings Highlands is not assessed separately. Its assessment value is determined in combination with the assessed value of the abutting owner's land as one parcel ? for tax purposes. Ergo, WR owners already pay higher taxes on lakefront property whether they own the lakeshore or not.

This fact alone should give council pause to reconsider raising the purchase price for remaining waterfront owners who may need to purchase the lakefront to sell their property. Instead of pursuing ?non-existent? township costs, council could be promoting further lakeshore sales at a reduced price. It is estimated that about 80 per cent of lakeshore land remains available for sale. Currently, abutting ratepayers have little incentive to purchase land they are already paying a percentage of taxes on anyway, which would raise their taxes further depending on the amount of lakeshore available to them.

The meeting ended in numb silence, with ratepayers shaking their heads as they left.

Lorraine Fell

Correction

According to Hastings Highlands Deputy Mayor Gregg Roberts the liability to municipalities for any person injured on municipal owned lakeshore land was removed by the province last fall -? therefore it's no longer applicable to Hastings Highlands. Incorrect information ran in the Jan. 20 issue of *Bancroft This Week* in a letter.