

Examine the CAO's pay

To the Editor,

The CAO for Hastings County has been in his position for many years now, recently retired, or semi-retired. He is the senior employee for the county.

Hastings County is the upper tier level of government to which you send a substantial portion of your property taxes (about 25 per cent). You don't get to vote for these folks as you do with your local council. It is made up of the elected council members from the 14 municipalities of Hastings County. They call the CEO of Hastings County warden (as we call our local CEO mayor or reeve). Why am I explaining all of this?

It's your property tax money they spend, and they should be accountable to you, but you have no opportunity to elect these folks. I sent the following letter to the Mayor of Hastings Highlands, Vivian Bloom, asking her to pass it on to the warden, Mr. Rodney Cooney about a month ago, which I am assured she did.

No response. So I sent the letter directly to Mr. Cooney about two weeks ago.

Here is the letter:

I noted in the local press that our CAO made \$266,000 in 2016 which seemed high for an upper tier CAO of the size and responsibilities of Hastings County.

So I did a bit more searching on our CAO, and his counterparts elsewhere in Ontario.

I found that our CAO enjoyed a 24 per cent increase in pay in 2016 and this was on top of a 9 per cent increase in 2015.

The average increase for CAOs across the province (about 3500 incumbents) was 3.6 per cent.

Our CAO is the highest paid of all county CAOs in Ontario.

And he is No. 11 of all CAOs in Ontario...I note for instance that the city manager in Mississauga is just slightly ahead of our CAO. Eastern Ontario CAOs include Prince Edward County (\$202,000), Peterborough (\$190,000), Haldimand (179K), Leeds/Grenville (\$172,000), Lanark (\$165,000), Northumberland (\$169,000), Lennox and Addington (\$165,000). Average for this roughly comparable group is \$177,000.

Our CAO enjoys a salary that is 50 per cent above his peer group which leads to these questions:

What is the governance process which has resulted in our CAO getting a 36 per cent increase in the last two years?

Who approved this pay increase and on what basis?

Is there a human resources committee of county council that does our CAO's performance review? Who is on this committee?

Is this increase reflective of the treatment of all county management in addition to our CAO?

Looking at county metrics, Hastings is relatively small (40,000), with no roads and predominately social services. What are the comparator communities the county uses to decide on the appropriate pay range for the CAO?

Looking at operational metrics for the county, what exactly are the areas where our CAO has made extraordinary contributions in the past two years that led to this extraordinary increase?

I have always had a concern that the overall governance of regions/counties leaves a lot to be desired in terms of accountability and transparency.

This treatment seems to confirm that no one at county council is acting on behalf of the taxpayer.

Mr. Cooney did reply and tell me that he will need to review my letter with the treasurer but will comment in due course. I will keep you informed of his response.

My source for the above numbers is the provincial government 'Sunshine List,' which hasn't been disputed as far as I can tell. We all need to pay more attention to this level of government we have no control over. It may be costing us way more than it should be.

Bill Cheshire

Baptiste Lake

Names have been removed from this letter.