

Questions following OMB prehearing

To the Editor,

A lot of ratepayers including yours truly left the Ontario Municipal Board hearing on Oct. 5 angry and frustrated. The hearing was deferred until Nov. 7. About 50 ratepayers showed up for the hearing and, unfortunately, the audio system did not function well, so most of the time it was hard to hear the proceedings.

Here are some facts about the wards versus at-large decision in Hastings Highlands and the timing of events:

May of 2016 a ratepayer group approached the council to inform them that they planned to appeal to the OMB to get voter parity for all voters in HH.

Nov. 23, 2016, there was a well publicized public information session on the options facing the municipality regarding voter parity. It was well attended.

March 9, 2017, there was another information session for ratepayers where the consultants for HH reviewed the options available to council. The public had notice of this meeting in advance.

April 19, 2017, was the council meeting to decide on the options. There were two motions: the first to remove one councillor from Monteagle Ward which was defeated on a two-to-five vote with Councillors Roberts and Matheson voting for the motion. The second vote was to move to at-large councillor voting and it carried five-to-two with the same two councillors voting against this motion.

June 5, 2016 Brent Dalglish filed an appeal on the bylaw to move to at-large councillor voting

July 18, 2017, the OMB informs HH that the appeal hearing date has been set for Oct. 5 and 6.

Sept. 10, is the date by which HH is to communicate to the public the appeal hearing. The actual HH communication does not occur until Sept. 22.

Sept. 22, HH informs the OMB of this missed date, apologizes, and is informed by the OMB in writing the same day that ?the service of notice is abridged? and the hearing will proceed as planned for Oct. 5 and 6.

Oct. 4, HH is informed by the OMB that they have changed their mind and the session the next day will not be the planned hearing but a ?pre-consultation.?

Oct. 5 at 10:30 a.m. the OMB adjudicator shows up, HH through legal counsel argues for the hearing to proceed based on previous written communication but the adjudicator declines and sets a new hearing date for Nov. 7 and 8. And 50 ratepayers as well as the press, many of whom had travelled long distances, went home angry.

A couple of questions you might well ask:

Why did it take the OMB a month and a half after the appeal was filed to set a hearing date?

Why did it take HH 12 days to realize they had missed the Sept. 10 deadline?

Why did the OMB not inform HH of their new decision not to hold the hearing well in advance of the hearing date so that ratepayers and the municipality would not waste time and money attending a non-event?

A comment about communication. Since the May 2016 event noted above, there have been countless letters to the papers, public announcements, meetings at property associations, emails, website event notices, etc. about this proposed change in voting for the 2018 election. No voter who has an interest in municipal affairs in HH can say they weren't made aware of this process that started formally 17 months ago, but some still try.

Regardless of your views on this issue, let's hope we can conclude this expensive OMB process on the Nov. 7 and 8 get on with regular business. Check the HH website regularly for any updates.

I hope to see you there.

Bill Cheshire

Baptiste Lake