

Garbage collection contentious in Hastings Highlands



Hastings Highlands council has cited cost-saving measures to justify its decision to stop collecting garbage. However, two years after the decision, residents have yet to experience any significant tax decreases.

By Sarah Vance

Tensions came a boiling point on May 2 at a special meeting of Hastings Highlands council when former mayor Ron Emond challenged the integrity of council's decision to terminate curb-side garbage collection service, dating back to Jan. 1, 2015. "It is disgraceful what your council has done, because the very essence and purpose of municipal government is to provide services," said Emond during the question period in May, as more than 200 constituents applauded.

Emond's statements are by no means new, as he voiced frustrations felt since this service was withdrawn without public consultation following a regular council meeting on Nov. 19, 2014.

"It is the vulnerable sector who have been most affected," states Emond. "And the damages continue to accumulate as time goes by."

Council has cited cost-saving measures to justify its decision, however, two years later ratepayers have yet to experience any significant tax decreases.

In fact, 2016 has brought a 1.23 per cent increase in tax rate per household.

"These are not things that we are setting up to aggravate people," said Mayor Vivian Bloom. "Everything is mandated by the province and costs keep getting downloaded onto municipalities."

Bloom states that curb-side garbage collection represents a \$750,000, hit to the budget line, however, Emond claims this figure has been exaggerated by the municipality.

"I will deliver a report which clearly demonstrates that your calculations are incorrect," promised Emond during the council meeting in May.

Emond has since commissioned an independent financial analysis of in-house collection which was delivered to council via email on May 15.

Dave Moore and Son's collection strategy is cited, with two trucks collecting waste and recyclables though out the municipality, over two days per week.

An hourly rate for one operator at \$25 and a general laborer at \$18 with a 35 per cent benefit estimate are quoted.

A two stream collection strategy is proposed, with one tandem six-ton chassis collector, at a cost of \$300,000, and one half-ton, at a cost of \$60,000, amortized over 15 years.

Emond's expenditures are less than half of what has been budgeted by municipal council, using a model that costs \$5 per week, at a yearly rate of \$260 per household.

This amounts to \$520,000 per 2,000 households.

"The municipality is (in effect) adding \$260, to the taxes of these already burdened ratepayers," states Emond in his email to council.

Pat Pilgrim, Hastings Highlands CAO, said the municipality received Emond's report and will be providing its own response at a council meeting on July 20.

Pilgrim says that operations manager Adrian Tomasini is preparing the report for council.

?Our operations manager will deliver the report in July and our next steps will involve following municipal process, where it could be voted that we need to gather more information, or where it could be voted to accept the reading,? said Pilgrim.

Hastings Highlands is a lower tier municipality of Hastings County which manages eight waste sites, with 4,170 households and a land area of 972 square kilometres.