

Mixed bag in Wollaston budget discussion

By Jim Eadie, Special to This Week

About a dozen Wollaston Township ratepayers attended the municipality's public meeting on the evening of April 7 at the Royal Canadian Legion Hall in Coe Hill to observe and participate in the council's budget deliberations for the next fiscal year. Council had decided at their previous regular meeting to reschedule budget deliberations to an evening session in order to be as accessible as possible to the largest proportion of residents who may wish to attend.

"I want to encourage participation," said Reeve Graham Blair. "I want this to be an orderly meeting." He noted that the meeting will be divided into a number of department budget areas, and after council members discuss that particular section, the public will be invited to ask questions or make a statement.

Municipal treasurer and deputy clerk Verna Brundage explained that considerable time has been spent by staff, meeting with the various departments and department heads to determine the priorities and needs for the coming year.

"Compared to last year's budget, we will be needing \$110,000 less from taxation than last year," she said. "More Ontario Municipal Partnership Funding (OMPF) at approximately \$157,000 will reduce that amount from taxation. The assessment is up slightly, the county assessment is down slightly, and the education assessment is down slightly... which will reduce the tax rate by 7.7 per cent. How much you will pay then will depend on your individual assessment."

OMPF funding from the province of Ontario is an annual unconditional funding to municipalities and is the province's main transfer payment to municipalities.

Following a very clear line-by-line review of the various department budgets, there were few questions from the floor.

Council decided to dedicate \$2,000 to public transit specifically for the first time.

In addition council decided to undertake a new private roads grant idea where organized private road associations can apply for yearly grants to aid in the upkeep and improvement of their private road. Grants would be based on the length of roads, and the number of residences serviced by the road. Details of the plan will be worked out, but the intention is to support private road dwellers that pay approximately half of the property taxes collected by the municipality.

Most of the audience's hostility was reserved for the cost of policing, and the services provided for that cost. The reconciliation for the next year has been received, and the predicted cost of \$193,200 must be paid in advance. At the end of the year there may be a return, or an addition to that cost depending on the calls for service in the municipality.

Councillor Michael Fuerth noted that according to his mathematics, that is \$525 per day to police the township.

"Policing costs a lot of money per person," noted Blair. "And it goes up by the call."

Questions arose from the audience about what exactly the municipality gets in the way of policing for that cost.

"We need a doughnut shop here," noted one frustrated ratepayer.

Council agreed to contact the OPP and arrange for the municipal liaison officer A/Sgt Scott Wilkes to attend a council meeting to answer questions.

Following the meeting several ratepayers praised council for the helpful meeting.

"More people should be interested in this, and learn about this process," said one.

"I have been fed up with politics," said another. "But I do support those here who are doing this work."

The budget is now scheduled to be approved at the next regular meeting of council on April 14.