

The saga is over

EDITORIAL

Shelburne's saga of the summer came to an emphatic close on a stuffy night inside Town Hall last Wednesday (July 10).

It was a result that shocked some, but delighted many. A unanimous, 7-0 vote in favour of keeping the 140-year-old Shelburne Police Service. It was clear to see just how much this decision meant to some in the community, with booming cheers echoing around Council Chambers in the immediate aftermath of the vote. Shelburne Police Chief Kent Moore was, seemingly, as happy as anyone else in the room, beaming from ear to ear having witnessed firsthand an incredible display of support in the local force.

Not that that particular point was ever in question. When Council first initiated the process to request a costing proposal from the Ontario Provincial Police last year, it was made crystal clear it was done on the understanding that Shelburne did not have a policing problem, rather a police station problem.

The current facility, located within Town Hall, has long been considered inadequate to house the Shelburne force's at-present 23 members.

Initially, the ask was for the municipality to find the funds required to build a brand new facility, something that would likely cost, at the very least, \$6 million. Unfortunately, the Town simply is not in a position to levy up that kind of dough to construct a new station. Nor is it in a position to borrow the money in order to pay for it.

Shelburne CAO Denyse Morrissey informed Council last month that the community was coming dangerously close to maxing out its borrowing capacity. Simply put, having secured long-term debt to help pay for substantial upgrades to the Town's water treatment facility and much-needed work on one of its municipal wells, there's very little left to address what is, truthfully, an equally important piece of infrastructure.

This is where the problems arose and the debate over whether or not the municipality could afford to keep its own police force originated. At most, the Town can afford to invest \$3.8 million towards renovating the existing station. But, once that's done, that's it. The Town will find itself in the precarious position of, potentially, not being able to fund another major project for several years.

We have always been advocates of the Shelburne Police Service. Inwardly, we believe any community that can afford to maintain its own police force should do so. Admittedly, however, heading into the vote, we had concerns over whether or not the municipality could, in fact, continue to afford SPS. Once dubbed the fastest growing town in Ontario, we're expecting to see two new major subdivisions come to fruition in the near future. That will, presumably, mean the local force will soon be on the lookout for some new officers. Forgetting for a minute the added annual cost of that, where, exactly, are these new officers going to be stationed?

Current plans to extend the current facility would see the station grow to approximately 8,760 square feet. Considering the station, in its current shape, is already bursting at the seams, we wonder if an extension would be enough to meet the force's demands five, or ten years in the future.

While it has already been determined Shelburne cannot afford a new station, we question if throwing \$3.8 million at an aged facility simply because that appears to be the only realistic option on the table is astute. We would hate to see the Town spend that kind of money today, only to find out tomorrow it still wasn't enough. Local Council, as well as the Shelburne Police Services Board has their work cut out to come to a reasonable, workable solution for all.

Of course, one potential solution down the road could be the development of a regional police force. If, like Shelburne's Council, Orangeville decides against signing a contract with the OPP, there may be potential for a partnership that would benefit both municipalities down the line. As the saying goes ? when one door closes, another opens. We sense another debate may yet be on the

horizon.