

Shelburne Council requests second OPP costing, Orangeville vote a deciding factor

Written By PETER RICHARDSON

Six months on from the unanimous vote that, seemingly, put the community's divisive policing issue to bed once and for all and Shelburne Council has this week voted in favour of reopening Pandora's box - officially requesting a new costing proposal from the OPP.

A special council meeting called for Monday evening (Jan. 20) revealed the true extent of complications brought on by Orangeville Council's decision to shut down its own municipal police force in favour of entering into a contract with the OPP.

A document withheld from Shelburne staff and Council prior to the community's previous OPP costing process, was made public in mid-December. That document highlights an informal agreement between Shelburne Police Service (SPS) and Orangeville Police Service (OPS), which saw OPS assist its neighbouring force across a variety of programs and services.

Under this agreement, OPS handled all dispatch services for Shelburne police, would often take care of court duties to free-up a Shelburne officer from making the trip to the Orangeville courthouse, and allowed Shelburne police to transfer individuals to Orangeville whenever Shelburne's holding cells were full.

With Orangeville set to transition to the OPP by October, it has been made clear to Shelburne Police that any agreement it had with OPS will not be honoured by the provincial force.

Shelburne CAO Denyse Morrissey estimated on Monday the Town would need to stump up approximately \$925,000 to plug the service gap that will be left behind once OPS is disbanded. This would be an annual expense, rather than a one-time cost, and would bring Shelburne's yearly police budget up to around \$3.8 million.

Shelburne Council has had to act quickly, after first learning of this agreement and the potentially drastic implications in early January. At last week's regularly scheduled Council meeting, the town's elected officials instructed Staff to prepare a costing covering all aspects of the agreement with OPS, as best they were able, plus the already expected cost increases.

CAO Denyse Morrissey delivered a summary of her report and the numbers revealed, presented a dramatic cost increase for policing in Shelburne.

Since Orangeville has voted to switch to OPP policing, these costs and services, must now be borne exclusively by Shelburne. In addressing Council, Ms. Morrissey noted the additional costs would require a tax levy increase of 12.39 percent. To put it more plainly, that would result in a tax increase of approximately \$1,000 per household in Shelburne.

It would perhaps, appear, that this new information was withheld from Council, during the OPP costing, because it was hoped that OPS would remain in place. Now, with that not being the case, the truth has been revealed, as to the costs of retaining the Shelburne Police.

The largest single increase, is the wages for three new supervisory officers. Including benefits these total \$464,545 annually. Additionally, there would be retention pay, for years of uniformed service, which is calculated on a 73/6/9? percentile scale, depending on the years of service. Officers with eight years experience get 3 percent, 17 years gets you 6 percent and 23 years is 9 percent. This is paid in addition to regular wages, for all officers in Ontario.

There is also the wages for a new special constable, which will be needed to carry out court duties.

That position will come at a cost of \$88,400, including benefits, with WASH Court duty coming in at an additional \$25,000 to \$35,000. Dispatch services are estimated to be \$113,000 annually. Not included in these calculations, are costs for uniforms, equipment, fleet or other applicable needs for increased staffing.

As a result of these new revelations, a motion was put forth by Councillor Hall and seconded by Councillor Benotto, to instruct staff to immediately request a new OPP costing. Councillor Hall spoke to his motion, stating that previously Council believed that the costs of keeping the Police service, could be, with some difficulty, sustained, but that these new costs were simply untenable. Councillor Benotto added that these cost increases would prevent Council from allocating funds to other priorities facing Council. The motion was adopted unanimously in a recorded vote. Mayor Mills, prior to the vote expressed the following thoughts.

? At the outset, I'd just like to take a minute to directly address the men and women of the Shelburne Police Service (both uniform and civilian), many of whom are here this evening.

As clearly as I possibly can, I want to reinforce to you that the issues we are confronting tonight are in no way a reflection of the amazing service that you provide to our community. Despite that, this Council has the unenviable job of having to make some very difficult decisions and those decisions will unavoidably impact each of you on a personal level. Unfortunately, there is nothing that I, nor anyone else can do to avoid that but I want to personally let you know how much your community appreciates all that you do and the professionalism with which you do it. Thank you very much for your service.

In July this Council voted unanimously to keep our Shelburne Police Service based upon the facts and circumstances that existed at that time. At the time of our decision in July, I think all of us understood that we were stretching ourselves right to the very limits of our financial capacity but we committed to try ? to try to find a way to keep our municipal police service without breaching those limits and putting our community at risk of financial ruin.

Since July, we have been confronted with new facts, and dramatically changed circumstances that are beyond our control. The realities that we face today are quite different than they were in July and that is precisely why we are back here tonight.

A number of the critical issues have been outlined in the CAOs report but for me personally, the larger question we now face is bigger than the facility, it's bigger than supervision, or dispatch, or court duties or any one individual issue. We have to look at the added costs that we now face and we have to seriously consider the long-term sustainability of Shelburne's municipal police service.

When you look around the Province, you will see a trend among small police services ? with ever increasing financial pressures, many are either moving to OPP or looking seriously at amalgamation or shared service arrangements with other neighbouring services to stay sustainable. With the pending disbandment of OPS, we are now literally an island unto ourselves and have effectively had a number of options now removed from the table.

When you look rationally at the facts and the new circumstances, you see that we have just simply run out of road. Despite what we may have hoped for, there is no pencil sharp enough that will sufficiently change the arithmetic, and even the best of intentions cannot change the reality that we now face.

When you look at things rationally, you have to conclude that we are left with only one option. That is why I will be supporting the motion on the floor. ?

Following the meeting, a number of current officers with SPS spoke with the Mayor and Councillors and having realized the gravity of the situation, were supportive of Council's decision. Shelburne is now ?an island in a sea of OPP,? to quote the mayor and there is no other option than to join with the surrounding municipalities and use the OPP for policing the town. There comes a time when realities must prevail over emotion and this may be one of those times.