

Residents facing 10 percent water, wastewater rate increase

Written By PETER RICHARDSON

Shelburne residents will see an increase in both their water and sewage rates as of the next billing period.

Shelburne's water rates are billed on a two part system, a base charge and a consumption charge. Both of these charges are being raised as part of a study done in 2017 by Watson and Associates, an economics firm specializing in such studies, which has recently been updated to account for three factors, namely, the cost of increasing the rated capacity of the Town's water pollution control plant, the updated cost of addressing the arsenic levels in Well 3 and the updated growth projections for the town.

The findings determined that an increase in rates for both water and waste water were required. These rate calculations are based upon a number of factors, including the size of meter base involved, the base charge and the consumption block used.

There are three consumption blocks, which are simply based upon the amount of water being consumed by the client. Most residential use falls under the first block, which is set at 0-220m³, or cubic meters. The next two blocks are primarily commercial uses, at 221-690m³ and >690m³. The average homeowner has a three-quarter inch meter base and therefore pays the lowest base rate.

The rate changes will be 10.2 percent for consumption and 2.3 percent for the base rate, for water and 4.6 percent for consumption rates and 7.6 percent for base rates for waste water. What this means, is that an average homeowners annual water bill will increase by 6.9 percent and their waste water bill by 12.3 percent. All told, this amounts to an average 9.9 percent increase in 2020, which translates to a \$90 to \$100 annual increase.

In subsequent years, the percentage increases will be considerably less, however, to put it into perspective , a homeowner now paying \$909 annually, will be paying \$1,322 in 2025 for their water and waste water usage.

These new rates, when compared to surrounding municipalities, puts Shelburne on a par with the mid range costs. Mono, for example is noticeably higher, at about \$1,700 annually for an average customer, while Orillia is at \$500 per average customer. The determination of average, is one whose usage is 185m³ annually with a meter base. Considering, the huge expenditures required to upgrade the treatment plant, between \$11 million and 14 4million, and Well #3 renovations coming in at \$1.77 million, plus the increases in population and therefore demand, a rate increase was expected. The good news is that mostly all the new capital expenditures will be covered from existing reserves, which means the Town will not have to borrow all the required money and increase the burden on taxpayers with the associated interest payments.

When asked about the necessity of instituting the proposed plant upgrades, vis a vis legislation requirements, Mayor Wade Mills responded that technically, Council could opt to do nothing over the next four years, however in his opinion that would be extremely foolish, as by then the situation would likely require a whole new treatment plant.

Last year, that new plant option was estimated at a cost of more than \$50 million. The middle of the road option now being initiated, is substantially cheaper and will be sufficient for the anticipated growth in Town. Should the Town grow beyond projections, a second look would be required at tat time.

Splash Pad

Shelburne is on the way to getting their anticipated Slash Pad.

The Splash Pad Committee made a presentation, their second, to Council, outlining the costs of the proposed pad depending on which water supply system was used.

They have determined that the most cost efficient would be using a re-circulating supply source as opposed to a potable water source. The latter meaning that the water would be used only once and then discharged into the sewer system. This type of system can pose problems of overburdening the waste treatment facility.

The committee proposed three possible sites for the facility, the CDRC, Fiddle Park and Greenwood Park and showed approximate costs for each. What they requested from Council, was to determine the site so that major fundraising could commence. The committee's goal is to raise all of the \$300,000 construction costs for the splash pad.

Council debated the three locations and centred on Greenwood Park as the new home for the splash pad. Several decisions promoted this choice, including the walkability, the convenience of having multiple venues in one location and it's central location. Although two councillors preferred Fiddle Park, the obstacles there were three fold.

Firstly, the master plan for the park is not yet completed, so the Town really does not have a handle on what should go there. Secondly, the infrastructure does not yet exist and third, the park itself is not readily accessible except by vehicle. In the end, Councillors agreed to tentatively place the pad in Greenwood Park. If the current schedule can be maintained, the park should open for the 2022 summer season.

Farmer's Market

Have any of you ever gone to the Shelburne Farmers Market? Did you find the experience to be less than ideal? Well, the market manager, Megan Timmins and Board Chairperson Jennifer Crewson came to Council last night to request approval to move the market from it's present location, to a new and more accessible one, with better parking and more visibility.

In the current location, on First Avenue west of Owen Sound, the market has been struggling from these exact deficiencies and some vendors are complaining of poor sales and considering not continuing to support the market. The ladies made a good presentation and stressed that they were open to other suggestions from Council as well.

They proposed to move the market to either Victoria Street, Williams Street or Adeline Street, with their preference being Victoria Street beside Town Hall. This choice raised several concerns on Council, as the Police station is right there and it is a main thoroughfare for people travelling south to Orangeville and beyond, as well as returning from those areas.

Although the Police traffic issue may soon be a mute point, as Shelburne leans toward OPP policing, the thoroughfare issue is not. Both Fire and EMS services use Victoria Street, in addition to the public and closing it for eight hours or more every week during the active spring and summer months would be problematic.

Council, in general, favoured Williams Street, especially since it has been reported that the old Sawyers Mill will soon be torn down to be replaced by housing. Despite being a Fire route, Williams St. offers all the amenities required and is already used by the Street Festival and other events. The street ,is wide enough to allow fire trucks to pass vendors, if required and has few businesses that would be inconvenienced if it were closed off one day a week. Arrangements could be made to help those businesses cope, plus the influx of people good provide new customers.

The request to Council was to facilitate soliciting old and new vendors, by being able to tell them that a new location was indeed available. Council responded by saying that they would refer the issue to staff to investigate but that the Farmers Market could and would certainly be moved for 2020. It might be a temporary move pending changing situations in the town, however. Staff will have their report ready for council for the mid March Council Meeting.