

Local Council votes unanimously to disband Shelburne Police Service & bring in OPP

Written by PAULA BROWN

Shelburne Town Council voted unanimously in favour of bringing OPP in to police the community during a special Council meeting on Wednesday evening (July 15).

The motion to accept the proposal from OPP was moved by Mayor Wade Mills. As a result, the Shelburne Police Service will be disbanded following 141-years of service in the community.

“Our ability to continue with a municipal police force is just no longer financially sustainable,” said Mills.

He added, “If we lack the courage to make the difficult and responsible decision that is required now, then what we are doing is effectively delaying the inevitable and we are allowing the Shelburne Police Service, an institution with over 100 years of proud service, to suffer a slow and painful demise. I’m not prepared to allow that to happen. The institution itself deserves better than this and more importantly our officers deserve better than this.”

Each councillor was given an opportunity to explain their decision to accept the OPP’s proposal.

“It’s been mentioned before and is worth noting again, we don’t have a policing issue. We never have in my experience within Shelburne, and I don’t foresee that being an issue (in the event that Shelburne Police Service was to stay),” said Coun. Kyle Fegan. “I just don’t see a financially responsible way where the police force will be sustainable going forward, even in the near future.”

Shelburne Council voted unanimously to keep Shelburne Police Service in 2019. A long-standing agreement between Orangeville Police Services (OPS) and SPS saw Orangeville handling dispatch service, court duties and transfers of individuals when holding cells were full in Shelburne. The Town’s need for new hires to fill the gap left behind with the disbandment included two staff sergeants, an inspector, and special constable who would carry out court duties, dispatch and other services. An approximate cost of \$925,000 to fill the service gap would see Shelburne’s yearly police budget jump to around \$3.6 million as early as 2021.

Some members of Council appeared visibly upset while making their decision. Some clearly felt they had put this issue to bed once and for all last year, and were unhappy to have been put in a position to have to make a different decision, no matter how justified, approximately 12 months later.

“Last year I truly felt we had this issue dealt with. At that point it was an accommodation issue. At that point we further burdened our residents with this. Tonight is no longer about dealing with an accommodation issue, it’s really about dealing with fallout from undisclosed documents, agreements and those related impacts. I struggled with the lack of transparency when we needed it most and that was when we started this process and made our initial decision last summer,” said Coun. Shane Hall. “Based on the facts laid before me tonight, I can financially no longer support the burden that (SPS) places upon our residents.”

In the initial proposal presented by OPP in January of 2019 it showed a cost projection of \$3.1 million in the first year of an initial three-year transitional contract. A breakdown of the costs for the first year would be \$2.68 million

for OPP services, plus a start-up charge of \$414,000 for vehicles, uniform and equipment. For the second and third year the cost would revert back to \$2.68 million. After the three years the costs would be determined by data gathered by OPP over the course of the three-year transitional contract.

The second, and most recent, costing proposal, presented by OPP Sgt. Ken Kee in June showed a slight increase in the costing for the OPP. An estimated annual budget for the first three years of the transition contract with OPP is \$2.85 million, plus a one-time

startup fee of \$417,913 for uniforms, vehicles and equipment in 2020, bringing first-year costs to approximately \$3.2 million. In the fourth year ,the contract would switch to the OPP billing model, taking base service and calls for service over the course of the three-year transitional contract to determine an annual cost for Shelburne. It's expected that those costs could be as low as \$1.6 million by 2025.

A recent survey commissioned by the Shelburne Police association shows that the local force's officers would find the transition to the OPP to be ?desirable?. In one of the questions, the survey asked Shelburne Police officers how they felt about transitioning to the provincial force and all of the respondents (100%) noted it would have a positive effect on job satisfaction, and provide additional opportunities for advancement and access to better training.

With Council voting to disband the Shelburne Police Service, an application must now be submitted to the Ontario Civilian Police Commission. It's expected that the municipality will transition its policing services to OPP by February 2021.