

Amidst uncertain future for local Crime Stoppers branch, Dufferin County kicks in funds

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Dufferin County Council has pledged to provide \$10,000 in financial assistance to Crime Stoppers of Simcoe?Dufferin?Muskoka, following a report on their uncertain future.

During their meeting on Feb. 13, Dufferin County Councillors received a delegation from Tom Young, vice president of the local Crime Stoppers branch, and Leslie Woodley, police coordinator for the organization.

The delegation requested that the County of Dufferin explore options to provide funding to the Simcoe?Dufferin?Muskoka Crime Stoppers branch so the organization can remain operational. Without the funding, the organization is expected to close their doors as of Aug. 1.

?We're in trouble financially. We're not a police program so we have no funding from the police and we're not a government program so we have no funding from the government at any level,? said Young.

?We all turn the news on and hear of something that's happened, and you hear ?call your local police or Crime Stoppers'. I can tell you unless something changes after August 1, this coming summer, that call the Crime Stoppers part won't be there anymore; we're that close. We had to set a date to fold the Simcoe?Dufferin?Muskoka Crime Stoppers and it'd be a shame if we have to do that,? he continued.

Crime Stoppers was created in 1976 in Albuquerque, New Mexico after Michael Carmen, a young gas station attendant, was robbed and murdered. Detective Greg MacAleese, the lead investigator on the case, had a local TV station do a re-enactment of the crime and the local gas station offered up a reward for any information that would lead to an arrest.

After six weeks of investigating, the police were able to make an arrest within hours of the re-enactment airing.

?Crime Stoppers works together with the police, the community and the media,? explained Woodley. ?It's a way to anonymously report crimes.?

To date, there are 37 Crime Stopper programs within Ontario alone. According to Crime Stoppers of Simcoe?Dufferin?Muskoka, there have been more than 5,300 criminals arrested and more than 7,400 cases cleared since their inception in 1987.

Despite working in partnership with police and the government, Crime Stoppers does not receive any funding from them to support their efforts.

Young said that the cost to run the program each year is approximately \$70,000 and that they currently have roughly \$35,000 to maintain until the Aug. 1 close date.

?I don't want this program to fold,? Young told Council.

Dufferin County would not be the only municipality providing funding support to maintain the Crime Stoppers of Simcoe?Dufferin?Muskoka.

Young told Dufferin County Council that the District of Muskoka provides \$10,000 a year to the local Crime Stoppers branch. He

added that the Mayor of Midland and the Mayor of Penetanguishene are also advocating for \$35,000 out of Simcoe County.

The first draft of the motion was brought forward by Mono Councillor Fred Nix, who suggested funding \$15,000 through the county's rate stabilization reserve. Fellow councillors expressed concern about using the reserve rather than the community grants program.

?I won't support money coming from the rate stabilization reserve. If we want to do this that's fine, but let's find money that we've committed to the budget,? said Coun. Philip Rentsch, Deputy Mayor of Grand Valley. ?I would offer the community grants program just because we put it up so much and they opened their intake. I won't support taking from the rate stabilization reserve; we need to stop that.?

?I'd much rather see something like this go through the formal process. We tend to do things on a one-off basis and I get that we get emergencies that come our way, but we've got a little bit of time. I'm sure the organization doesn't appreciate a delay when they're under stress, but really, I'd prefer it went through the grant program,? added Coun. Todd Taylor, Deputy Mayor of Orangeville.

Other Dufferin County Councillors expressed their apprehension about using the community grant program to fund the support.

?I don't support this type of program being put through the community grant program for a couple of reasons. If we think this is something that should be funded in perpetuity then find a line in the budget and we'll put it in there. If we have to make an emergency contribution in year one and move it forward that's fine,? said Coun. Darren White, Mayor of Melancthon. ?The community grant program to me is not designed to be doing some of what it is, which is a regular source of funding every single year for the same organizations.?

A final motion proposing Dufferin County Council provide \$10,000 in emergency funding for one year to Crime Stoppers of Simcoe Dufferin Muskoka was passed by majority vote.

The motion also included that the County of Dufferin will contact the chief administrative officers (CAOs) from the other involved municipalities to create a more ?equitable? funding approach for future years.