

County reinstates condo garbage rebate cancelled in June

Written By JAMES MATTHEWS

Dufferin County's decision to axe the garbage rebate for condominium residents is not fair, according to at least one landlord.

Kim Jaspers-Fayer of Jaspers-Fayer Property Management wrote to the county in July in response to the rebate program's cancellation. He also appeared before council when it met Aug. 27.

He said his complaint is about an issue of fairness.

‘This [rebate] is not a handout for condominiums,’ he said.

The \$25 rebate program was introduced by Orangeville in the 1990s before it was taken over by Dufferin County when the county assumed waste collection.

‘The rationale for the rebate was that condo owners were paying for waste collection in their property taxes,’ he said.

So condo owners were diverting waste that didn't have to be collected by the town initially and the county afterwards.

The rebate program cost the county less than \$11,500 for all condos. That's against a total budget of about \$6 million.

Condominiums pay fees for garbage disposal. Residents of those units also pay for garbage disposal through their property taxes. That's between \$250 and \$300 of their property taxes. He said there are as many as 1,000 such residents in Dufferin. And he said about 75 per cent of them are single women.

‘They are paying twice for the same service,’ he said.

The county doesn't offer a property tax discount. Instead, condo residents were offered the \$25 rebate, which had remained the same since the 1990s, even though the consumer price index ‘has doubled in that period,’ he said.

‘The rebate obviously only offsets a portion of the private disposal costs,’ he said. ‘The elimination of the rebate would result in everyone's condo fees increasing by over \$2 per month.’

Though a toonie monthly increase may seem trivial, Jaspers-Fayer said most condo residents in Dufferin County are seniors on fixed incomes. They've already seen significant increases in their condo fees since inflation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brenda McCullagh owns a condo, pays taxes, and is a director on her condo board. She said she is bothered by what she saw during county council's June 25 meeting.

‘Clearly there needed to be more of a fact finding effort performed prior to a vote taking place, as there were a lot of questions and comments made before the voting,’ McCullagh said. ‘To me, it looked like the councillors were not prepared to vote at that meeting.’

She wondered what facts the council used to form the foundation of its decision to discontinue the rebate program. She said the possibility of reaching out to condo taxpayers or their board of directors wasn't mentioned during the June meeting.

‘After all, they are paying for a service they do not receive,’ McCullagh said. ‘I did hear a councillor address the word fairness. I agree (that) we need to be treated fair and equal.’

Councillor Todd Taylor, who is Orangeville's deputy mayor, said the only way for county council to revisit the rebate cancellation issue would be for somebody who voted in favour to bring it back.

Taylor did just that and a little more. He suggested council rescind the decision to cancel the program and that the rebate be continued.

Coun. James McLean, who is Melancthon's deputy mayor, said the issue is a question of taxation fairness for residents and he favoured reinstating the rebate program.

“They are the only residents in the county who are having to double-pay,” he said.

Further, McLean suggested that council consider increasing the rebate when it comes time to debate items for the 2027 operating and capital budget.

Coun. Darren White, the mayor of Melancthon, said when it comes to taxation fairness, likely every county resident could put forward a program for which they pay but don't use.

“We can't be bringing pieces back for discussion after we've made a decision,” he said, and added that he was happy to go with council's wishes.

Coun. Philip Rentsch, Grand Valley's deputy mayor, agreed with White.

“I would add that I pay \$12,000 a year in property taxes for nothing,” he said. “I need absolutely nothing that this organization, this county, provides. I barely need anything that the (Grand Valley) provides.”

The rebate was cancelled because council sought ways to save money, he said.

“This is nothing,” Rentsch said. “This is a small subsidy, it's nothing. But we keep doing it year over year, it adds up.”

McLean said the issue isn't about a rebate to residents who choose to opt out of a service. Rather, it's about residents who are not eligible for county garbage pickup.

“Imagine paying to access your local arena and then being told because of the street you live on you're not able to access that arena,” he said. “So now you've got to pay to access an arena in Brampton. That's what we're talking about.”

In the end, council voted to reinstate the condo waste collection rebate's elimination.

When asked to consider whether the rebate should be increased closer to the cost of living, Rentsch suggested amending the motion to include a rebate for residents who are taxed for snow clearing but don't use the service.

Coun. Wade Mills, Shelburne's mayor, said an amendment for a subsidy increase is moot if money for the increase has already been approved in the 2026 budget, as was previously stated.

Council agreed to ask staff to look into options for improving the rebate program and how they can be implemented next year.