

Local job centre proponents voice opposition to closure

Written By JAMES MATTHEWS

A number of voices have become a chorus of concern about the closure of the Shelburne Resource Employment Centre.

As part of a recent service review, Dufferin County identified a number of ways to realize about \$1 million in savings. One of those is closing the employment centre, which will retain about \$50,000 in county coffers.

Much has been written on various social media channels about the decision to shutter the employment resource at the Mel Lloyd Centre in Shelburne. Eight more taxpayers wrote letters to county council for its Sept. 10 meeting, asking that the decision be reversed.

"We pay enormous amounts of money in property taxes and for what?" Shelburne resident Haley Butler wrote. "You cannot even drink the water here, yet you won't fix the issues but you're willing to take away some of the limited service we do have. It's appalling to think that you would close something that is so beloved and needed in this town."

Karen Blackwood is another resident and taxpayer who said the resource centre has served Shelburne and area for many years. In that time, it has become much more than an employment office, she said.

"It is a welcoming place where residents can get help with resumes, job searches, paperwork, faxing, printing, photocopying, housing applications, Ontario Works, (Ontario Disability Support Program), taxes, birth certificates, and other important supports," she said.

"It has also been a valuable resource for newcomers who are learning how to navigate services in our community."

Disabled people, those who are unemployed, and vulnerable people need more supportive services, not less, Blackwood said. She added that the community will suffer from the closing.

"For many residents, especially those without reliable transportation, travelling to Orangeville for appointments or documents is a real hardship," Blackwood said.

If closing the centre is being considered to save money, Blackwood suggested the facility open for three days a week.

"This would still reduce costs while allowing Shelburne residents to access the services they rely on," she said. "The Shelburne Employment Resource Centre makes a meaningful difference in our community, and I hope every effort can be made to keep this support available."

Lindsay Wegener, a Shelburne town councillor, said the town is approaching a population of about 10,000 people, and it's continuing to grow. Given the increasing numbers of those people and residents of neighbouring municipalities, local access to employment services is more important than ever, Wegener said.

"The centre also plays a key role in connecting local employers with workers, supporting our growing economy and new businesses in Shelburne," she said. "Keeping it open ensures our community continues to have the tools needed to find good jobs close to home."

Geraldine Curlew, another Shelburne resident, said many other service groups use the Mel Lloyd Centre facility. Federal and provincial government agencies, as well as the Upper Grand District School Board and Georgian College, also offer services there.

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