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Shelburne CAO paints bleak picture with OPP decision on the horizon

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Shelburne's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Denyse Morrissey presented council members with a staff report on Monday, indicating the Town doesn't have the money to keep its local police force.

?What has a bearing on the decision that Council has before you, is your debt management policy,? said Morrissey.

The report overviewed the scenarios of debt management if the Town were to borrow money from the provincial and federal government to construct a new police station, or carry out upgrades to the current one.

The severance cost of the Shelburne Police Service is about $2.3 million. The cost to upgrade the current police station is approximately $3 million, while a brand new facility would cost the municipality more than double that amount.

?Just to reiterate, if we were to borrow $3 million, as we said last time, for the average residential property, based on a 15-year loan that is $80 (per year). And if it was based on a 20-year loan it is $64 (per year),? explained Morrissey.

The Town currently has a debt of $5.2 million, and has already approved necessary infrastructure projects totalling $20.4 million. That amount does not include any projected costs to construct a new police facility.

One of the necessary projects is the wastewater upgrade and the Town will need to raise their borrowing capacity from 40 to 45 per cent of the provincial allowance. The projected cost of that project is between $12 and $14 million.

The other main projects include a 15-year debenture for the $1.7 million Well #3 project to reduce arsenic levels. The municipality has also committed to completing the Sister Street project. Morrissey stressed the Town would not be able to pay off their current loans for several years.

?It's a difficult situation and we stressed this during the budget,? said Morrissey.

The option to build a new police facility is out of the question, according to Morrissey. As well, Shelburne Police Chief Kent Moore has advised municipal staff that the proposed $3 million upgrades to the current police station would, simply, not be enough to bring the facility up to where it needs to be.

The upgrades would only grow the police station by 8,760 square feet.

Morrissey looked into taking money from the Town's reserves, a move that would only give the municipality an extra $1 million.

?It would take us a few years to pay our reserves back,? she said.

Council members seemed shocked with the numbers presented by both the CAO and treasurer Carey Holmes.

?Even if we were to borrow $20 million, we would not be able to pay that back,? said Morrissey

Council now faces a big decision as it ponders whether or not to accept the proposal put forth by OPP back in Janaury.

Mayor Wade Mill's made it clear that this police matter would not be addressed at the next Town Council meeting, but that he will hold a special meeting specifically on the issue.

Community member Marg McCarthy asked if Council would hold another meeting on the police issue and listen to the public concerns.

Mayor Mill said that the public has added enough input into the situation and that no more meetings would be held for the public to discuss their concerns over disbanding the local police.

Council has until July 14 to respond to the OPP.