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Shelburne Council holds ?longest meeting in recent memory? on Monday

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Council sat for one of their longest meetings, in recent history, Monday evening (April 8). The Agenda started out with the Fiddleville Non-Profit Housing Board Meeting, which was followed by Question Period and three lengthy Presentations before the members even got to the actual day's business matters.

Mayor Questioned

During Question Period, ex Police Services Board Chair Len Mikulich, questioned the Mayor about his proposed upcoming motion to investigate whether the existing police station could be renovated up to Provincial requirements for a total expenditure of $3 million.

His first question was why only $3 million had been set aside, to which the Mayor replied that that was a figure that the Town could possibly afford to finance. He went on to elaborate that two previous sub-committees had investigated the issue of a new police home but had approached it from an ?open ended point of view'.

The Mayor felt this was wrong and that the project had to have a maximum budget in order to be realistic to the Town's fiscal abilities. Mikulich, countered that the Province allows the Town to borrow far more than $3 million, and why would Council not consider a greater amount. The response from the Mayor was that the Town had to be responsible.

He used the analogy of a person with a credit card with a limit of $50,000. Just because they can spend that much does not mean they should. If they know that they have substantial home repairs to make, it would not be prudent, much less, responsible, to go out and use the card to buy a new car.

CAO Denyse Morrissey, countered that the Town had many more projects than just the Police to concern themselves with and they had to consider all their expenses when determining what to undertake. For example, later in the meeting, Council had to consider borrowing over $1 million to facilitate the upgrading of WELL #3 to meet Provincially mandated regulations concerning Arsenic levels in Town water.

Mr. Mikulich then noted that the public wanted reasons for not considering all options available. Len insisted that Council publicly express their decisions on all options. Mayor Mills pointed out that only three options existed, build a new building, renovate the existing one or retrofit another building to suit. The only one the town might be able to consider was his motion to renovate for no more than $3 million.

Resident and real estate broker Marg McCarthy, wondered why only $3 million and not open ended and expressed her contention that the SPS would provide more than the OPP.

The Mayor answered that the cap had already been explained and that the consultant's report would answer the service comparison. Marg then asked what would happen to the police station. She then expressed a thought that most people probably have, . in that the existing building would have to become part of the Administrative Budget and therefore would be an additional cost, on top of a potential OPP contract.

This question was answered by Town Clerk Jennifer Willoughby. She indicated the existing Police Station is already, and always has been, under the Administrative budget and no new costs would result if the OPP were chosen.

Mayor Mills added that it was too early to decide what would happen to the accommodation, as total OPP control was a long ways off yet and Council would decide it's fate at a later date, should they choose the OPP. Also, OPP or not, the station was not viable

any longer, in its current configuration.

Autism Awareness

The first presentation, concerned Autism Awareness. One in every sixty-eight children are afflicted with some form of autism and although not curable, it has been proven that with appropriate therapies and treatment, throughout their lives, those lives are significantly improved. The Council Proclaimed April 2 2019 as Autism Awareness Day in the Town of Shelburne. It should be noted, that this proclamation was first made public on April 2, by Mayor Mills and Councillor Kyle Fegan.

BDO Report

The second presentation was by the Town's auditors, BDO. It was presented by Sally Slumskie and Angela Nichol.

This report was very comprehensive, covering all aspects of the Town's financial dealings with the conclusion that everything was in order and above board. Ms. Slumskie took the opportunity to thank the Town Treasurer Carey Holmes

and Town staff for all of their help in facilitating the audit, saying it had been a pleasure to work with them.

Faith Believers Fellowship Church

Next up, was a presentation by Nicole Jefferies from the Faith Believers Fellowship Church, concerning partnering with Shelburne in celebrating Black History Month.

FBF is a sister church of North Peel Community Church and has partnered with the Town of Caledon on various initiatives including BHM. They were proposing a similar partnership with Shelburne.

One of the focuses of their work, is the youth and their accomplishments in their communities and the greater world community. Ms. Jefferies noted four notable black citizens of Dufferin County. George Hannahson was the first black settler in Dufferin, William and Mary Ghant farmed some 300 acres here and Mary Taylor of Owen Sound sold fruit and sweets in the town and later opened an eatery in the Market Square. The final accolade however, struck much closer to home, as she recognized our Deputy Mayor, Steve Anderson as the first Black Deputy Mayor in Shelburne. Council agreed to stay in contact with the church as next years celebrations approached .

Insurance Issue

CAO Morrissey, clarified the insurance issue that has been circulating in the Town.

This concerned third party events on Town property. These events must now carry their own insurance and are not covered by the Town's policy. They must carry at least $2 million if there is to be no alcohol and at least $5 million if alcohol is present. Volunteers at these events do not require their own insurance coverage,

Well #3

Following this, the CAO presented a report concerning the arsenic problem in Well #3. It should be noted, that this is a naturally occurring problem and is covered by Provincial legislation.

Previously, the Town had anticipated receiving a top up grant from OCIF, the Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund, of $1.5 million to aid in this $1.7 million to $2.1 million project. They were qualified for the grant and did not need to do anything further.

However, the Ford government, in their infinite wisdom, cancelled the entire OCIF program and instead awarded all communities

with a prorated sum. Shelburne, received $546,666. This left the Town with a serious shortfall. The repairs to Well #3 are provincially mandated and must be completed before the next provincial inspection date. Failure to do so would result in the closure of Well#3, which produces 25 percent of the Town's water and the possible charging of the Town and Council for operating an unsafe well.

The report, has recommended the allocation of 100 percent of the money from the province and an additional $200,000 from reserves to fund the issue, with the rest coming from a debenture from Infrastructure Ontario. Provided that the costs do not exceed the minimum estimate, the Town will need to borrow a minimum of $1 million. This will increase the Towns long term debt repayment by over $100,000 annually.

Council voted to proceed with the project and to lodge a formal complaint with MPP Sylvia Jones over the cancelling of OCIF, without warning or consultation. Shelburne is the largest town in Ontario, affected by the arsenic issue, which is a result of the province changing the acceptable limits, from 25 micrograms per litre to the current 10 mg/l. Regardless of anything else, this will have dramatic impact on both the Water and Sewage rates and the Town's borrowing capacity.

Policing Motion

Mayor Mills read his policing motion following this discussion and defended it to Council. When asked if other options could be revisited, he replied that was up to Council, at which point Councillor Walter Benotto clearly stated that a new building was out of the question as the Town could not afford it. Walter pointed out that the estimates in hand, did not include the purchase of land or the servicing go the building both of which would raise the cost over the $7 million mark.

When asked about wiggle room on the cap, the Mayor replied that it would depend on the circumstances and the amount. Councillor Benotto noted that the effect of going over, would also have to be viewed in light of other project funding. Treasurer Carey Holmes pointed out that borrowing $3 million over 20 years would cost the Town $201,479 annually, on top of the Well#3 project and any other needed borrowing. The motion was carried.

Sewer Insurance

In other business, Councillor Benotto presented a motion concerning an insurance plan available to residents through AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, to protect homeowners from sewer line repairs between the trunk line and their homes. Many do not realize that this expense is the responsibility of the homeowner and in the event of a failure, can amount to $10,000 or more. His motion was for the Town to make it know to homeowners that this is available to them. Deputy Mayor Anderson expressed a concern about possible liability and stressed that any notification must indicate that the Town itself has nothing to do with and accepts no liability concerning the insurance, but is simply providing information.