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Shelburne Council remain deadlocked with OPP decision now just a month away

Written By JULIA LLOYD

Monday's council meeting was swarmed with unimpressed facial expressions when a third party consultant presented his final report, recommending that the Town disband its 140-year-old Shelburne Police Service.

Jon Hambides, principle of Pomax Inc. Consulting, confidently told council that the police services offered by the OPP would not be any different from the services that are being provided now.

?The lowest cost for the Town would be the OPP,? Hambides stated, ?even though, in three years, the OPP yearly increase would roughly be 1.5 per cent.?

However, Hambides insisted that even with annual increases, the OPP is still the cheaper option.

Coun. Walter Benotto was not impressed with the consultant's final findings, and said the OPP provide only a ?base service.?

?I don't think in my mind it is a fair comparison, because I think the Shelburne Police provide more than just a base service. There are enhancements that they providing and I didn't see that comparative in the report,? said Coun. Benotto.

The examples of enhancements, said Benotto are things such as walking throughout the town at nighttime, visiting schools, biking through the neighbourhood, etc.

?Or ? when they get out of their vehicle to talk to a little girl to ask what happened? Those are the kinds of enhancements I'm looking for and I don't think I will see that with the OPP and that is why I am a little concerned,? he said.

Hambides disagreed and said those exact enhancements are actually calculated into the report and explained there is two methods the OPP have adopted.

?The first method is, proactive policing, which includes road patrols, traffic enforcements, school visits and the things Coun. Benotto was talking about. All (of those are) included in the base cost.? He said. ?Then there are the reactive policing and those are the calls for service, a separate cost.?

At a special June 3 meeting, held to study and analyze the policing options available to Shelburne Council, Hambides stated transitioning to a service provided by the OPP would yield almost $6.5 million in savings by 2027.

However, if the Town stays with the Shelburne Police, it will initially cost in the region of $3 million to renovate the existing police station, located within Town Hall, whereas the OPP would work out of the Dufferin OPP detachment in Primrose. To build a brand new police station, as has been debated in the past, the community would be facing a multi-million dollar investment, likely in the region of between $5 million and $8 million.

Coun. Lindsay Wegener didn't look impressed with the consultant's statement that the enhancements currently provided by the Shelburne Police would not change if the community transitions to the OPP.

?Do you have a chart to show that? I see here we have numbers from the Shelburne Police Service for routine traffic stops, community services, traffic enforcement, but I don't see something similar for the OPP.?

Coun. Wegener said. ?So it is easy to say it is in their base model, but will they apply the same amount? In our town we have an issue of speeding, so when I look at routine traffic stops and I see 3,000 routine traffic stops, I appreciate that.?

Wegener asked the consultant if the OPP would continue with the same level of community police work.

The consultant responded by saying ?it is not possible to compare those numbers based on the statistics of Shelburne for the last three years. If Council decided to go with OPP, it is up to Council and say this is the same level of service you had with the Shelburne Police.?

The faces on Council did not seem in happy spirits and the public listening in were also cheering on every comment made by Council defending the Shelburne Police.

Many Council members had multiple questions regarding the report. Mayor Wade Mills asked how Hambides got his numbers that indicates other municipalities are happy with the OPP.

Hambides explained his survey process, pointing out that it doesn't survey straight from the public. He noted that he actually only asked CAOs from each municipality; which did not sit well with many Council members.

Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson asked Hambides whether the Town could depend on these numbers in the report. But, unfortunately, Hambides answered saying there is no guarantee, but he believes his numbers are accurate.

Other questions regarding the report included: What is the number of police officers dedicated to Shelburne? Hambides said the OPP would provide 15 officers.

Coun. Kyle Fegan queried as to why the OPP proposal only accounts for one officer to connect with kids at Centre Dufferin District High School, compared to the two or three the Shelburne Police currently provides. Hambides responded stating the OPP analysis highlights that using one officer would be more efficient.

Another question, posed by Coun. Shane Hall, centred around the possibility of losing officers assigned to police Shelburne to neighbouring areas. He wondered, if an incident were to occur in the Town of Mono, whether or not an officer on shift in Shelburne would be called away to respond. Hambides noted there was a high possibility of that happening.

As the clock ticked on, it appeared Council finished up on Monday night with many questions still unanswered. The municipality has until July 14 to make a final decision on the future of policing in the community.

A little later in the agenda, Len Mikulich, a retired municipality clerk, got up in front of Council and presented a speech on the importance of the Shelburne Police Service, and hopes his words might impact council decision before July 14.

?The town of Shelburne has 140 years of working with the Shelburne Police Service,? said Mikulich

?This is it. Council will have to make its most historical decision regarding the 140 (year) Shelburne Police Service. Tonight I address you as a citizen who measures Town Council by its success and of its challenges and decision it makes,? said Mikulich.

As Mikulich finishes his speech, he left Council with, potentially, one final question before they go on to make their final decision.

?Are you willing to give up the Shelburne Police Service for what ultimately will be fiscal motivations only?? Mikulich asked.