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Shelburne... which direction home?

By Lee Dunn

As many will know, census figures show that the Town of Shelburne is the fastest growing community of 5,000+ in all of Ontario, and the second fastest in Canada. Town council has been grappling with many issues, and two of these at the forefront are policing and development / infrastructure.

Our current Police station, built in 1994, requires either an upgrade or a new facility altogether, due mainly to substandard holding cells and interviewing facilities. Other issues to do with policing include financial concerns, and council has sought out a costing from the OPP as to the feasibility of their taking over the policing of the town. This is still pending.

If Shelburne is to retain its own Police force, there appear to be three options: Upgrade the present facility, move into a larger existing building (yet to be found), or build a new station. The figures heard at council range from $5.3 million to $6.4 million. It's unclear what, if any, effect this would have on property taxes.

Finances aside, many people have expressed concerns about losing our town police force in favour of the OPP. Long time residents especially feel that Shelburne Police know the community and have built up long standing relationships within it. It's felt that they could respond more quickly than officers coming from Primrose, and that we would have a more consistent Police presence if we retained our own force. It's also unclear whether any or all of the current Shelburne Police would retain their jobs by transitioning to the OPP if the changeover were finalized. Mayor Ken Bennington has expressed surprise that the OPP feel they could service our town from their Primrose station.

Mayor Jeremy Williams of Orangeville has put forth the idea of having Shelburne Police amalgamate with Orangeville, stating that their facilities could house any police needs that we have. He has also said that a County Police force would, in the end, be more efficient and less costly. The Shelburne Police Board has asked council if this is being considered, and have received the answer that it will not be considered until the OPP costing is in.

As for the growth of our town, it seems that Shelburne is moving rapidly toward becoming a community of close to 10,000 people. The new Fieldgate Homes development is under review, proposing 320 new homes and commercial space. Construction could conceivably begin next spring. In addition, the recent bombshell that Fiddle Park lands could be sold to a developer has created quite an outcry. There's a perception in council that the land is underused, and that its sale could provide significant revenue to the town, presumably some of it going to policing, infrastructure, and public use lands for parks etc. Many will miss the current Fiddle Park, as it provides space for two major events: Trailer parking for the Heritage Music Festival and for Pickin' in the Park. It's not clear how these events would be housed without it.

A number of service clubs and individuals have contributed their time and money to the park, and it seems to me that it is just getting off the ground in its value to the community. There's a lot of town spirit invested here. I do hope we are not to become just another suburb of the GTA, packed with matchbox houses, and with negligible public use lands thrown in as an afterthought.

Lastly, there's been quite a ?stink? raised lately about the nasty odours coming from our sewage treatment plant, and questions raised about its capability of handling the developments previously mentioned. I've heard opinions from several sides. One states that the matter has been discussed by Council and is well in hand. Another quotes people who work there who say that the plant is having trouble keeping up with even the current demand. Then there are those of us who let our noses tell the story.

As for my own feelings, I will say that my family moved to Shelburne nearly 30 years ago from Brampton. For a couple of reasons: to escape the noise, traffic, and congestion, and of course for housing affordability. Back then; it was a pretty sleepy village. To us, it seemed close to paradise. The one-hour drive to work was even worth it. Now, it feels like we're living in the suburbs again.

Go ahead. Tell me to move out if I don't like it.