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Weekend transit service suspended by council

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Commuters using the Grey Transit Route in Shelburne will need to find alternative transportation for their weekend trips come the new year.

During their meeting on Monday (Oct. 3), Shelburne Town Council voted unanimously in favor of suspending the weekend transit service as of Jan. 1. The reason for the decision is due to the increasing cost surrounding the on-demand transit service.

The transit service in Shelburne initially launched in 2020 as a weekday service funded by a $2.3 million grant received by Grey County and Southgate Township from the provincial government. The funding was used to implement service from Dundalk to Orangeville, also known as Route 2, Monday through Friday. The Town of Shelburne does not fund or contribute any cost to the weekday service.

In July of 2021, a five-month pilot project to expand the transit service to include weekend was launched, with council approving a monthly cost of $5,000 for the weekend service expansion. The weekend service cost increased to $5,500 per month in 2022.

The agreement with Grey County to provide weekend service is set to expire on Dec. 31 and Town staff said the new cost is estimated to increase to $6,800.

?The inflationary costs that all operations are experiencing, I don't think is lost on us. We have seen significant increases in our capital costs, in our operating costs in many other service areas that we purchase,? said Denyse Morrissey, chief administrative officer. ?This is a significant increase from what we have budgeted in the past.?

Council was presented with two options, either to continue with the transit service at the increased cost or to suspend the service and have the new term of council consider the cost as part of the 2023 budget process.

?Based on the options, from my position, it would seem to me that option number two would be prudent under the circumstances, since it is a significant impact,? said Deputy Mayor Steve Anderson. ?I still think no service or transit to move people is another cost, but that being said I think it is something a new council should consider.?

The sentiment was shared by other councillors.

?I tend to lean with the Deputy Mayor,? said Coun. Kyle Fegan. ?Because of where we are coming in and the significant cost increase, I think this really should be something that is put forward to the next council.?

Coun. Shane Hall added, ?Option two provides some relief from the overall cost burden that we are going to be placing upon the next council. The cost is extreme and as such should be an item for the new council.?

According to the report, the suspension of the weekend transit service will be occurring during the months that recorded the lowest usage in 2022.

The 2023 operating budget is anticipated to be approved in mid to late March. If approved in Council's 2023 budget, the weekend transit service will be reinstated.